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VENGEANCE of the GOLDEN GOD

By
E. K. JARVIS

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The

OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

AS THIS issue goes to press we've been sitting back waiting until the last minute for boss editor Howard Browne to get his editorial in to us from some two thousand miles away. Howard flew out to Portland, Oregon, to attend the World Science Fiction Convention in that city. He was scheduled to fly down to Los Angeles a day or so after the Convention and write his editorial, then shoot it in to the office. So what happens?

WE RECEIVED a long distance telephone call a few minutes ago from Howard, informing us that he has suffered a slight mishap. It seems that his right hand ran into a pointed discussion with a broken aspirin bottle and he couldn't sit down to a typewriter and do his duty. Now we're entirely sympathetic with Howard's plight, (although we wonder just what he was doing with a broken aspirin bottle) and so after a little coaxing we agreed to do his editorial for him this month.

NATURALLY we can't give you the glowing account of the Convention that you've been waiting to hear about—you'll just have to wait until next month when Howard puts it all down on paper. But we did ask him if the Convention was a big success and he said it exceeded all his expectations.

SO WHAT'S the boss doing in Los Angeles? For the record it says that he's there on part of his vacation. But that's only for the record. We happen to know that he's putting a little private pressure on the Movie Capitol in the interests of science fiction. Just what sort of pressure? Well, as the editor of the leading science fiction magazine in the world (that's us) and as a competent writer in the field himself, he is in a position to know quite a bit about the business from the standpoint of what the American Science Fiction Public wants—and expects to get—from Hollywood.

WE DON'T mean to infer here that the editor of AS and FA is going to

tell the movie moguls how to run their business (although in some respects relative to the field that's not a bad idea) but we do hope that a word or two sincerely offered over a luncheon table with a number of producers will give the movie people a little clearer idea of this most rapidly expanding field of entertainment, and just how to go about developing it from their end.

ALL OF US are familiar with the first two films that Hollywood has taken a crack at in the stf world—*DESTINATION MOON* and *ROCKETSHIP "X-M"*. And we all know that there were certain aspects of these productions that could have been measurably improved had a little more care been exercised in the "planning" stages. So perhaps a word from the editor of science fiction's largest magazine will help produce finer stf films in the future.

ALL OF WHICH goes to show that we're not going to sit by and twiddle our thumbs in the newly awakened trend to our favorite type of literature. And just in case you're not aware of it, take a walk to your neighborhood book store and examine the many science fiction titles on sale. Then take a look at the slicks. Our science fiction writers are appearing in them more and more frequently. And of course, as we've mentioned, the movies are now turning speculative eyes on the field. We predict that you'll be enjoying more stf on local television stations too! And certainly, radio has been on the band wagon for a long time now.

ALL OF THIS enthusiasm, incidentally, is being absorbed by the writers. We talked to Ted Sturgeon, Rog Phillips, and Geoff St. Reynard during the past week, and these boys are just brimming over with ideas. And what's more, they say they'll be doing even better writing—and a lot more to boot. Naturally you'll be seeing their yarns in AS and FA. So keep your eye on your local newsstand for forthcoming issues. Until next month then.....WJH

AMAZING STORIES

DECEMBER 1950

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VENGEANCE of the GOLDEN GOD



**When that mysterious door
swung open, revealing the
dust of two thousand dead
years, three archeologists
knew the meaning of fear!**



As he looked up in startled amazement it seemed as if a figure was materializing in the room...

By E. K. Jarvis

"DIG, DIG, dig!" Bill Bruck said, bitterness in his voice.

"I came here as an assistant in archeology and all I've done so far is dig a trench in the side of this hill big enough to make a garage for a truck."

Wiping sweat from his brown face, he stared distastefully at the pick he was holding. The expression on his face said he would like to throw this

digging tool into the harbor of Rhodes far below, and might do just that at any instant.

Jed Franklin leaned his weight on the handle of the shovel he was using and laughed. He was about the same age as Bill Bruck, he had the same brown skin and the same easy-going disposition. The two were firm friends, though a stranger might have thought they were bitter enemies, judging from the words they customarily said to each other.

"Does your poor little back hurt?" Jed said, mock anxiety in his tone. "Cheer up, it'll hurt worse before we finish digging this trench."

"You go to hell," Bill said. "If I have to dig it up, you have to shovel it out, and—" He broke off as a voice from the end of the trench inquired:

"Are you guys at it again?"

The voice was sweet, the tone pleasant. Only the slightest shading of the words revealed the real intent behind them. Dressed in shorts, wearing a light blouse that was considered scandalous here in this ancient city where most native women still considered it proper to wear a heavy veil, carrying the lightest of aluminum tripods and a camera hardly bigger than a pocket watch, Sylvia Ames was standing at the beginning of the trench. She was something to look at, was this girl, whether you saw her on the streets of Chicago, Paris, or in the narrow channels that served as streets here in this town of Rhodes.

When she spoke, neither Bill nor Jed turned to look at her. Neither seemed to be aware of her presence. Their faces instantly turned completely and suspiciously blank.

"Do you get the impression you're hearing things?" Bill Bruck said slowly.

Jed Franklin cupped his ear and listened. "Not a thing. The wind blow-

ing, maybe, the gulls squalling over a hunk of meat, but nothing else do I hear."

"Um," Bill said. "Do you *smell* anything then?"

Jed sniffed the air. "Come to think of it, I believe I do get a whiff of—ah—now I know what I smell. It's that rare exotic perfume called *Kiss Me Again*. Or is it *Come Hither*? It's kinda hard to tell which of those perfumes is which."

"It smells more like *Come Yonder* to me," Bill said. "Could it be that, do you think?"

Sylvia set down the tripod with a jar that made the aluminum fittings rattle. "Look, you two jokers, it was neither *Kiss Me Again*, *Come Hither*, or *Come Yonder*! It was good honest toilet soap. Soap! You know what that is, the stuff you use to keep clean with. From the way you two smell, you must never have heard of the article."

All three laughed explosively.

"Look, woman, this is the sweat of honest toil you smell on us," Bill Bruck said. "Of course you wouldn't know the meaning of honest toil. All you do is take pictures. Call that work?"

"I am the official photographer of this archeological expedition," Sylvia said, loftily. "It is my duty to take pictures. My work requires skill, not muscles—Eek!"

THE LAST word broke from her lips in a startled squeak as she saw what had come around the corner of the trench and was standing near her.

It was the man they knew only as Skirmer. Apparently Skirmer was a native of this island but obviously he was the result of the blending of a dozen different racial strains. Tall, apparently very strong, his head as hairless as a billiard ball, dark

skinned, with darting black eyes that instantly saw everything and seemed to see nothing, Skirmer had put in an appearance soon after the expedition had gone to work. He had showed keen interest in all their activities, especially all activities that involved digging.

Skirmer flicked an amused glance at Sylvia from hot black eyes, a glance that seemed to say he understood her actions perfectly, and was amused by them. After one single glance, he forgot her completely.

He looked at the trench in the side of the hill, regarded it thoughtfully for a moment, his manner that of an engineer estimating in inches the progress of the job. His examination completed, he turned and without speaking a word, walked around the end of the trench and out of sight.

For a moment the two men stood in silence. Then Bill Bruck said. "Evening inspection again! Every time that buzzard appears I get the impression he expects me to come to attention, click my heels, salute, and ask his permission to continue breathing. Every evening he puts in an appearance and inspects our work. Every morning he does the same thing as if he figures we might do some digging at night, just to fool him. What's bothering him, anyhow? What does he think we might find here?"

"I wish I knew," Jed answered slowly. "He must think there is something here that's important, otherwise he wouldn't be coming here so often. But what is it?" He spoke musingly as he tried to ponder this intangible problem which he sensed was somehow or other the important clue to some important mystery. But what mystery? And what did the clue mean? And what was going on here?

"I don't like that man," Sylvia spoke firmly. "I wish he'd stay

away from here. Can't we call the police, or something, and have them make him stay away?"

"The police?" Bill snorted. "They would probably side with him. Remember that to a good chunk of the natives here, we are not only foreigners, but representatives of Yankee imperialism, and probably up to no good, from their viewpoint. My guess is that Skirmer probably thinks we're hunting for buried treasure—always a favorite delusion of the natives when archeologists go to work digging holes—and he is hoping to declare himself in on anything we may find." He glanced sideways at Sylvia. "Why did you jump like that when he put in an appearance?" As he spoke, his face had all the blandness of an innocent cherub.

"I didn't jump!" Sylvia answered indignantly. The faintest trace of a blush appeared on her face.

"Oh, I see," Bill said. "You didn't jump. Of course, you wouldn't jump because no brave young woman like you, carrying the banner of the new age, would ever be scared of anything as insignificant as a man."

"I wasn't scared," Sylvia denied. The color grew on her face.

"Not over three feet high," Jed said.

"I did not!" Her words were hot but her face was hotter.

"You have no real reason to be scared of Skirmer," Jed continued. "Even if he got you, all he would do would be to put you in his harem, where you would be about sixth from the top on his list of favorite wives. And don't tell me they don't have harems in this part of the world. They still do, you know, but perhaps not on this island."

"I don't want to be in anybody's harem!" Sylvia said, her anger still growing.

"Well, what do you want?" Jed said.

"I want to be Number one wife and Number Only wife in somebody's life," the girl answered. As she spoke, all bravado dropped from her and for a moment she was just a little girl dreaming the oldest dream that ever a woman knew, the dream of a home and a man and babies. Bill and Jed regarded her thoughtfully, but with sympathy.

"Well," Bill said. "Can this be our Sylvia talking? Can she be speaking like this as a representative of the Brave New World, the coming age, the vanguard of the future?" He laughed, but without derision. There was sympathy in his voice as if he understood and approved all she had said.

"You go to the devil," Sylvia said, but without animosity. She shot a quick glance at Bill Bruck as if she was suddenly seeing him from new eyes. "Now if you two loafers will only get out of the way, I'll take some pictures. Otherwise, when the boss gets back from Cairo he may think you have been loafing all the time."

Bill sighed. "Give her a whip and she would be a regular slave driver. The boss won't need your pictures to prove our industry. He can just look at this long, deep trench and know instantly how earnestly we have attended to business during his absence. As for instance, this way."

Lifting the pick from the ground, he sank it into the forward wall of the trench, where it would serve as a standard measurement for the pictures Sylvia was going to take.

The point of the pick went in up to the handle. The earth gave forth a dull booming sound.

Jed Franklin was instantly excited. "Hey, Bill, you hit something hollow in there. There's something buried at

the end of this trench. Dig into it, but fast."

IN A MOMENT, Bill Bruck had forgotten all his fatigue. It was hard to dig trenches only when you weren't finding anything. Now they were finding something and digging became an exciting adventure. Bill jerked the pick free from the dirt which held it.

A large chunk of hard-packed earth came free with the pick. Revealed there was the object the pick had struck.

"It's a large piece of metal standing on end," Jed Franklin said, examining it.

Pitted and corroded but not rusted, with particles of dirt clinging to it, this piece of metal was clearly visible. Above it rose the hillside. Anything could be buried here under this dirt. The earth could even have been piled high in this one spot in an effort to hide something, to cover a large object. The hill had an artificial appearance anyhow. Maybe it wasn't a hill, maybe it was a mound!

Jed Franklin hastily scraped away at the metal. "Say, this is real bronze," he said. Excitement crept into his voice. "This metal may belong back in the Bronze Age."

"Don't get too excited," Bill cautioned. "It'll probably turn out to be a garbage can that they buried there."

"You dope, they didn't make garbage cans out of bronze—too expensive stuff for that. They didn't have garbage cans anyhow, they just threw the garbage out the kitchen door and let the dogs fight for it. Dig this out, Bill, it may be very important."

"I'm digging," Bill answered. He looked back over his shoulder at Sylvia. "Are you getting pictures of all this for posterity?"

"I'm getting them, pal," Sylvia an-

swered promptly. "They'll be in all the papers with this caption: YOUNG ARCHEOLOGIST DOING SOME WORK FOR A CHANGE."

"Aw, go soak your head. Hello, here's our other inspector—Archimedes."

As he glanced back at Sylvia, Bill had seen the wizened little Greek that they called Archimedes appear around the corner of the trench. Although Archimedes probably wasn't his real name, Jed had tagged it on him and he hadn't seemed to care. Like Skirmer, he visited them often, but unlike Skirmer, they were fond of him. In appearance Archimedes somewhat resembled an overgrown and very elderly chimpanzee. A little fuzz of gray hair around his head heightened this resemblance.

But no monkey ever born had the engaging grin, the winning personality, of this little man, no monkey ever had his good humor. And no monkey ever had the something else that lurked deep within his eyes and showed occasionally in the stumbling English words that he used—a vast and complex understanding of nature and the way nature worked. Sometimes his grasp of natural law awed both Bill and Jed. Obviously uneducated, he spoke an archaic form of Greek that Bill and Jed found difficult to understand. Still, even without much or any education, Archimedes, the man who looked like a chimpanzee, seemed somehow to possess an intuitive understanding of hidden truth for which modern science is still grasping.

Archimedes stared at the metal Bill was uncovering. His face was a wrinkled mask of astonishment and of satisfaction. He broke into an excited torrent of sound that was not understandable and came running into the trench. Before Bill quite realized what was happening, Archimedes had

snatched the pick from his hands and was digging furiously in an effort to uncover the buried bronze object.

"HEY," BILL yelled. "Cut it out." There is nothing an archeologist likes less than having an amateur use a pick in his excavation. Picks are used for only the roughest sort of work. Valuable objects may be broken forever by such crude instruments. When the strata being investigated begins to show bits of broken pottery, shaped stone, beads, or any other object that human hands may have touched or shaped, the pick is instantly abandoned for a trowel. Or for even much smaller tools, including delicate brushes made of camel's hair.

"Give me back that pick, you idiot, before you do some damage," Bill ordered.

A spurt of language like water from a hose was his answer. Bill did not begin to understand what Archimedes was saying, but he understood clearly that the chimpanzee man had no intention of letting go of the pick. Instead Archimedes intended to use it as it had never been used before.

Bill looked helplessly at Jed. "What'd he say?"

"He said something about this bronze object being a door of some kind. Somebody's door, he said it was."

"Door of Chares," Archimedes spoke, struggling to find English words to express his meaning.

"Chares?" Bill repeated. "Who in heck is Chares?"

"Chares of Lindus," Sylvia said. "Of course. Who else?"

"And who, my dear young female, is Chares of Lindus?"

"Was, William. He *was* the sculptor, artist, engineer, or whatever you want to call him, who designed and built the Colossus of Rhodes."

"Huh?" Bill said. His mouth fell

open from astonishment. Now that she had made the mental connection for him, he recalled who Chares of Lindus was. And Sylvia was right. "Out of the mouths of babes—"

"Oh, archeologists don't know everything," Sylvia answered. "And don't call me *'babe.'*"

At the end of the trench Archimedes was working like a feverishly agitated monkey. He tackled the hard dirt as if he thought it contained diamonds and was expecting the next stroke of the pick to uncover a bushel of them. Jed tried to stop him and was angrily waved off.

"Heck, let him dig," Bill said comfortably. "If I had known he could dig like that, I would have put him on the business end of that pick long ago."

The frantic work of the little man was already bringing results. The dirt was falling away in layers. Something was emerging.

"It is a door," Jed said. "A bronze door."

A few minutes later the door was completely revealed. It was part of a wall hidden in the hill and facings of stone were visible.

"By golly, if that door opens, then there is a room behind it that is completely buried in the hill," Jed said.

Excitement had again crept into his voice. What vast secret was hidden here in this hill and had possibly been hidden here for more than twenty centuries?

ARCHIMEDES cleared away the last of the dirt. The door stood there, pitted and corroded but apparently still a solid barrier shutting off—what? On the monkey face of the little Greek an expression of rapt satisfaction was visible. His face said that the hopes and dreams of his life were all coming true. Like a priest before the altar of a revered and adored

god, his face showed rapt ecstasy.

He began to scrape at a particular spot on the door.

"By golly, he acts as if he is looking for the key-hole," Bill Bruck gasped.

The little man was feverishly scratching at a spot that was about the right height from the level of the sill to be a key-hole. As they watched, amazed and startled, he found what he was searching for.

"It is a key-hole," Jed whispered.

The round hole was now plainly visible in the solid metal of the door. Archimedes scraped away the last of the dirt, applied his eye to the hole, and apparently tried to see what was inside. He straightened up. "Ah!" he said. It was an exclamation of pure satisfaction.

From his pocket, he produced—a bronze key. It was six inches long and it contained a complicated system of slots and turning levers. He thrust it into the hole.

"Archimedes, do you know what the hell you are doing?" Bill Bruck demanded. He was astonished beyond words. Not only did Archimedes seem to know the identity of this door, but he had a key for it.

The little Greek did not answer.

Working the key gently into the hole, he began to turn it. Sweat was visible on his monkey face. The key turned a little, stopped, turned again. Somewhere inside the recesses of the metal there was a sullen click, as of long unused metal turning with great reluctance.

"Unlocked!" Archimedes gasped the single word.

He jerked the key from the lock, thrust the key into his pocket, bent over and applied his shoulder to the door.

It did not move.

"Help," he whispered. More sweat was visible on his face. Sweat dark-

ened in streaks the frayed and ragged shirt he was wearing. "Help."

Bill Bruck and Jed Franklin moved as one man. Each put his shoulder against the door.

They shoved. Somewhere inside of them each was aware of Sylvia yelling excitedly about something but neither paid her any attention. They were too excited about the door and the thought of what might lie behind it to pay any attention to a mere woman. Behind this door might lie wealth, the jewels of Ophir, the gold from King Solomon's mines. Or anything else.

With a shrill squeak of protesting metal, the door swung inward. Inside the room beyond was--blackness.

With an excited squeal issuing from his lips, Archimedes dived into that blackness.

Bill Bruck, Jed Franklin and Sylvia Ames stood staring after him.

A click sounded behind them.

Bill Bruck turned.

Skirmer stood there at the end of the trench. Skirmer was watching them closely.

With him were three other men.

Skirmer had a gun in his hand.

CHAPTER II

SKIRMER'S face was glowing with eagerness. His black eyes were alive with surprise and with something more than surprise--with hot, alert anticipation. If Archimedes had seen the hope of a lifetime coming true in the discovery and opening of this door, so likewise had Skirmer. The fact was obvious on his face. And one other fact was there too--that Skirmer's hope and the hope of Archimedes were as far apart as darkness and light.

Bill Bruck goggled at the sight of the swarthy-faced Skirmer and the three men with him. Thoughts flashed

through Bill's mind: Skirmer had been vastly interested in their excavation here. Had he expected them to find this? Or perhaps he hadn't really expected them to find it but had known that something existed somewhere to find and had thought they *might* stumble on to it.

Whatever his reason, Skirmer had certainly kept close watch on them.

"Hey, Jed, Sylvia--we got visitors!"

"Tell 'em to wait," Jed Franklin answered. His head half-way through the door, Jed was trying to see what was inside the vast room. Sylvia, making little squealing excited noises deep down in her throat, was looking over Jed's shoulder.

"I'm afraid these visitors won't like waiting," Bill answered hastily. "Well, what do you want?" he said to Skirmer.

Skirmer seemed already to have reached a decision on this point. He answered without any hesitation whatsoever. "I wish you and the others to turn around and walk through that door."

"Huh?" Bill gasped. "Wait a minute, pal. We're--"

"Walk through that door." Skirmer said. He lifted the gun. It was a Luger, a powerful, dangerous, deadly hand weapon.

"Hey, Jed, Sylvia!" Bill whispered.

At the tone of his voice, the other two turned. For the first time they saw Skirmer and the weapon he held. At the sight of the gun, Jed shied like a startled horse. In World War II he and Bill Bruck had seen enough weapons to last them a life-time, neither wanted under any circumstances to see another gun, particularly one that was pointed at them.

"What the hell's this?" Jed spoke. "Put that gun down before it goes off and hurts somebody." He spoke firmly and he meant every word he said.

"The gun *will* go off if you do not do as I say," Skirmer answered. "If somebody gets hurt, it will be one of you. Now turn around and walk through that door. Stop as soon as you get inside. Move!"

Under the pressure of the gun, they had no choice except to obey. Bill Bruck heard Sylvia Ames breathing heavily, glimpsed the rise and fall of her breasts. In this moment she was a badly frightened young woman. Jed Franklin, with his hands half raised, looked as if he was seeing a ghost. Bill shrugged and stepped over the door sill. He did not begin to understand what was happening, or why, but sooner or later Skirmer would look in the other direction. At which time, Bill Bruck firmly intended to see how Skirmer would react to a hard fist to the jaw.

He stepped over the stone door sill and on to a floor of stone. In the darkness objects were dimly visible. He caught a glimpse of machinery of some kind, what kind he could not tell. He did not see anything of Archimedes. Apparently the little chimpanzee man had vanished into the gloomy darkness of this cavern.

THE PLACE smelled of mould and decay and of long disuse. The air was heavy and oppressive. Somewhere in the distance there was a soft, continuous hum. The blackness directly ahead of them was intense and seemingly impenetrable.

Skirmer and one man followed them inside. Skirmer spoke rapidly to the two who remained outside. "I am going to close the door. I want you to cover it up again, with dirt, and make the place look as if nothing had ever been found here."

"Sure," one of the men answered. "But how will you get out?"

"The door opens inward. I can open it from the inside and dig the dirt

away—if I want to get out."

"Okay, boss."

Without relaxing his vigilance for an instant, Skirmer produced a flashlight from a pocket. The heavy bronze door squeaked again as he shoved it shut. The only illumination now came from the flashlight Skirmer carried.

"Go ahead of me," Skirmer spoke. "And don't try anything."

"And if we *do* try something?" Bill Bruck demanded.

"Interpret my words any way you please," the man said sharply. "But remember one thing—a dead body left in this place may not be discovered for centuries, much too late to do anything about the killer."

His words were cold, his tone colder.

"Don't try anything, Bill," Jed whispered. "He'll shoot first and think about it afterwards. Or maybe he won't even bother to think about it at all."

Skirmer said. "Move forward, please."

Bill Bruck started forward, and drew back.

"Hey, I can't see where I am going!"

Skirmer threw the beam of the flashlight forward. It struck what seemed to be a curtain of blackness. Striking the blackness, the light seemed to vanish, to disappear.

Bill took a step away from the curtain. To him, it seemed to be a sort of black mist that extended upward as far as he could see and that came down to the level of the floor. It looked like a curtain of impenetrable nothingness.

"What is that thing?" Jed Franklin said.

"I don't know," Bill said. "But I don't like the looks of it." Without quite knowing how he knew it, he was aware that this black curtain was dangerous. It seemed to swirl, to have

a life of its own. He had the impression that it was made up of millions of microscopic particles and that each particle was in rapid motion, much too rapid for the eye to follow. He had never seen anything like it before in his life. Solidified fog mixed with the blackness of the darkest midnight would perhaps have looked something like this curtain swirling here in this underground room they had discovered in the side of this hill near the city of ancient Rhodes.

Fear was in Bill—and the impulse to run. This curtain was dangerous, he knew it was dangerous. The impulse to get away from it was strong in him. He started to draw still farther away from it.

A hand clamped on the back of his neck, a foot was planted in the middle of his back, and he was literally shoved headfirst into the swirling blackness.

As he was hurled forward, Bill knew that Skirmer was the one who had shoved him, knew also that Skirmer was using him as a guinea pig to test this curtain, to determine how dangerous it really was before Skirmer trusted his own precious hide within it.

"You yellow dog, some day I'll pay you back for this!" Bill gasped. Then the curtain folded around him like a wet blanket of fog and he was falling.

HE HAD the impression that the curtain had shielded the lip of a bottomless pit. Hurled through it, he had fallen into that pit. He could feel himself falling, falling, falling. A scream ripped from his lips. The sound was hurled back in a thousand echoes from the blackness around him.

There was no way he could judge how long he fell or the distance he dropped. He seemed to fall forever and he seemed to move a tremendous distance as he fell. He had the dazed

impression that centuries moved past him as he dropped, centuries flashing by like the stream of traffic passing a fixed point on an express highway. His conscious mind told him that this impression could not be the correct one but something else in his mind insisted that it was correct.

With that thought came panic.

Before the panic could become real, the curtain vanished and he hit with a bone-shaking jarring thump, falling forward and rolling over and over as he fell.

Through dazed uncomprehending eyes, he stared at the scene around him.

He was in what seemed to be a huge workshop. There were tools, forges, hammers, anvils, and much other equipment which he did not understand in this shop. All of the equipment was primitive and many of the tools seemed to be made of bronze but obviously this was the workshop of some man who did a great deal of work with tools and with mechanical devices. Equally obviously, this place was something else too—a sculptor's studio.

He reached this conclusion because of the eight-foot bronze statue standing on a pedestal on the far side of the room. Only a master sculptor could have constructed this statue. It was a work of art. Perfectly proportioned, with every hidden muscle clearly delineated, it was the figure of a man. His skin was the color gold, he held something that looked like a torch in his hand, his head was lifted high. The set of his head and the cast of his sightless eyes seemed to say: "I look afar. I see hidden sights. I hear hidden sounds."

That was the impression the dazed Bill Bruck got. He also got the impression there was something familiar about the statue, what it was he could not grasp at the moment.

Two men apparently used this

workshop. One was a sculptor of exceedingly great skill; he had constructed this statue. The other was an engineer; he had built and used these tools, these forges, these anvils and these hammers.

Two men—or perhaps only one man owned and operated this shop. If only one man owned it, then he was both sculptor and engineer, a genius somewhat on the order of Leonardo da Vinci, who could both design a fortification and draw the Mona Lisa. Sometimes one man did have two such abilities, but not often.

But whoever had built and used this shop, no one was here now. Bill had the impression that the time was late in the afternoon, that the shop was closed and men who worked here gone home to dinner.

He also had the impression that he was crazy.

This shop could not exist. You could not go through a shimmering black curtain and fall a million miles and end up in a workshop of some kind. It was not possible. Since his eyes told him it was possible, he could not believe his eyes. If he could not believe his eyes, he was crazy. Or dead.

Panic was rising in him again, the mad panic that revolts the mind. He scrambled to his feet, stared from wild eyes around him. Fear clutched at his diaphragm, sending his breath through his lungs in great panting heaves. He wanted to run, he would have run if he could have seen any place to run to. The result was, he stood still.

Out of the very air in front of him, Sylvia Ames fell.

HE HEARD her scream, saw her drop perhaps a foot to the floor, saw her hit on her feet, saw her legs give way, saw her sprawl on the hard stone. She crouched there on her

knees and hands, her hair falling down over her face. She stared out through her hair from glazed and uncomprehending eyes at the scene around her. Sylvia's gaze came to focus on him.

"Help—" she whispered.

The single faltered word broke the trance that seemed to hold him. He was at her side instantly, helping her to her feet, feeling the dead weight of her body as she tried to rise but could not help herself because there was no strength left in her legs.

"Bill.... Bill.... What happened?"

"I don't know. Are you all right? Are you hurt? I mean—" He didn't know what he meant, all he knew was that he was making noises, that the fear that she had been hurt was even greater in him than fear for his own safety.

"I—I guess I'm all right. Skirmer shoved me into that black curtain just after he shoved you into it. He was jabbing that gun in Jed's back too. I just caught a glimpse of it as he shoved me into the blackness."

"Ah!" Bill Bruck said.

Jed Franklin had also appeared in the air a foot above the floor. Like Sylvia, Jed let out a yipping yell as he fell, like Sylvia he sprawled on the floor. But he had had more experience in falling than Sylvia, he rolled as he hit, and he came to his feet with a leap, faced Sylvia and Bill with his fists drawn up ready to fight.

"Welcome home," Bill said, grinning almost hysterically.

"I thought you were Skirmer!" Jed dropped his fists, he looked around him, his mouth fell open. "Uh!" he said. "Uh. What—happened?"

"Try to be a little more original, please. Sylvia said the same thing only a moment ago." Bill Bruck had recovered control of himself. He was being flippant deliberately. He needed to be flippant to keep control of himself, to keep from admitting the

serious reality of the situation, and to keep Sylvia and Jed from losing control too.

"Uh?" Jed said, still slack-jawed, then he grinned. It wasn't a happy grin that struggled through the acute discomfort on his face, but it *was* a grin. It said that he at least was in control of himself.

"Look!" Sylvia whispered. "Look! The door!"

She was pointing toward the front of the big room. Bill and Jed turned. Clearly visible in this shadowed place, where the only illumination was a dim and failing light streaming in through open windows, was a big door. They stared at it.

"By golly, that's the bronze door we just came through!" Jed Franklin said. He started toward it.

Bill caught his arm. "No, Jed, wait. Don't go near that door yet. Look. There's something between us and it." Bill had caught just a glimpse of this something that was between them and the door. As thin and as fragile as spider webs, a curtain hung there. In the dim light in the room it was just barely visible.

"That damned curtain again!" Jed Franklin said. "But this isn't the same one. I can see through this one, I couldn't see through the other."

Jed started forward and again Bill caught him. "It may be the same one only it looks different from this side. It may be like peacock glass. From one side, you can see right through peacock glass. From the other side, you can see nothing. The curtain may look black on one side and as thin as a spider web on the other. Stay away from it until we know what to do."

Jed hastily drew away from the curtain. He stared at the spider web hanging in the air, his face a mass of wrinkled perplexity, then turned quickly as the sharp creak of an open-

ing door came from the back of the big room.

"Shhh! Get out of sight! Someone is coming in."

They could see the back door opening. A dark figure was visible in it, closing it. They started to draw back into the shadows. They must have made some sound, for the figure lifted its head and stared toward them.

A sharp challenge rang out, in Greek.

"Hey!" Bill said. "I know that voice. That's Archimedes!" He lifted his voice in a shout.

Muttering in broken English and Greek much too fast for them to translate, the little man with the face of a chimpanzee came dashing toward them.

CHAPTER III

"HOW YOU get here? How you find way through veil? I hurry to turn it off, fast. I think I have plenty time, that you be afraid to go into it for hours, maybe for days."

In a mixture of Greek and English, the words popped out of the little chimpanzee man. He swung his long arms excitedly, his wrinkled face was a mask of perplexity.

"Being afraid had nothing to do with it," Bill Bruck answered. He explained what had happened. The chimpanzee face got dark with rage.

"Skirmer, he push you into veil to protect own skin!" Archimedes literally spat out the words. "He not feel it safe for him to go first, he find somebody else to take the risk. Now he is on the other side trying to make up mind whether or not anything bad happened to you. Come quick, we must turn off veil before he gets courage to come through it. We no want that Skirmer here!"

Archimedes turned and went racing

across the room without waiting to see whether or not the others were following him. They followed him all right, not to follow him was to their way of thinking at this moment the height of folly. Archimedes seemed to know at least something of what was going on.

"Which is a damned sight more than I know for sure," Bill Bruck explained. "Lead on, little pal. Where you go, I follow."

"Me, too," Sylvia and Jed said, in the same instant.

Archimedes stopped to unlock a door. "I have key for outer door. I not have key to *this* door," he explained. "Have to go get key before can get through door here. Have to get through this door before— Ah." The door opened.

A flight of steps led downward. The walls glowed dimly, providing the only illumination. They went through the door, Archimedes stopped long enough to lock it behind them, then he went down the steps on the run. Down there was a huge basement room. Light came from dully glowing walls, floor, ceiling. Apparently some substance had been painted on the walls, some substance which glowed, and this provided illumination.

The big room was jammed with equipment. But it was equipment that none of them had ever seen before. Huge vats rose to the ceiling. Large cables entered the vats and went from them to other pieces of equipment.

"It looks just like a huge wet battery, of the kind I used to make when I was a kid," Bill Bruck said.

"Maybe that's just exactly what it is," Jed Franklin said. "What's Archimedes doing?"

Archimedes was standing in front of a panel examining with rapt interest a collection of what looked to be meters displayed there. But if those were

meters measuring electrical impulses, they were meters the like of which neither Bill Bruck nor Jed Franklin had ever seen before.

There was not a voltmeter or an ammeter in sight. There was not a moving hand anywhere on the panel. Instead one of the meters—if it *was* a meter—seemed to depend for its reading on the operator matching the color of a liquid in a tube against a color chart pasted on the panel right beside the meter. Another consisted of two upright twin tubes in which liquids were visible and it looked something like a wet bulb thermometer.

If Bill and Jed could not understand the meters, Archimedes seemed to understand them. He studied them with intent interest; he made an adjustment here, another adjustment there. There was a sound in the room, a soft continuous hum that Bill vaguely recognized as the same sound he had heard when Skirmer had first forced them through the bronze door upstairs. The sound came from here then. From the way Archimedes cocked his head and listened to the hum, Bill got the idea that the hum was another electrical indicator of some kind.

ARCHIMEDES WENT rapidly through the room, making a swift but complete inspection. Then, with a quick movement, he opened what was obviously a switch of some kind.

The hum died into quick silence. A feeling of tension, as of strong electrical currents flowing, vanished from the room. The impression Bill Bruck had was that throwing the switch had cut off the flow of very strong currents and that machinery that had been in operation had stopped working.

"Ah!" Archimedes wiped sweat

from his face and stood up. "Now the curtain is gone."

"What do you mean?" Jed questioned.

"The curtain—how you say it—was created, generated here by this machinery. Now I have stopped the machines. Now the curtain no longer exists up above us." He lifted his eyes to the ceiling. "When curtain does not exist, Skirmer cannot come through it."

What he said made sense of a certain bleak sort. There were elements of satisfaction in it. Skirmer with his gun was now no longer a threat to them. That was something to be pleased about. But there were other things about which a person could maybe not be pleased. Bill Bruck tried to put his finger on these other things. He could not identify them. They existed only as a feeling of fear, of discomfort, of suspense, of something about to happen.

But what could happen, now?

The way Archimedes looked, nothing could happen. His face was relaxed and pleased and his eyes had an expression of deep satisfaction in them. Archimedes looked like a man who has come home after long and unhappy journeying in distant, unpleasant places, and is savoring to the full the simple satisfaction that results from being home again.

"I take you my house, soon. But first, check things here." He beamed at them and then busied himself among the equipment in the big basement room. When he had finished, they followed him up the stairs and out the back door. They took one look at the scene around them.

Bill Bruck gasped. "Where in hell are we?" Now he knew one of the other things that he had only sensed before. Now the feeling of suspense, of something about to happen, turned into reality.

They were on the slope of a hill looking down at a city. The sun was just sinking out of sight at the edge of the horizon. The city lay below them. It was a city of stone buildings, of narrow winding streets. In front of it lay a harbor protected by a mole shaped into a long arc. Behind the mole was a snug refuge for ships. And the ships were there. The ships had strange rectangular sails and—

"Look!" Jed whispered. "Those ships are galleys. See the banks of oars!"

But something else was visible, something more important than the ships, a gigantic statue that loomed over the harbor. Or was it a man, a giant, standing there with his feet firmly planted across the harbor entrance? In this dim and failing light it was hard to tell.

"Wh-what--what is that?" Sylvia whispered.

"My statue," Archimedes said, happily. "You saw model in workshop. This is real statue." He waved in the growing dusk toward the gigantic figure standing guard over the harbor.

"By God, now I know what that statue is!" Bill Bruck gasped. "That's the Colossus of Rhodes!" The thrill of discovery sounded in his voice. Then, instantly, the thrill was gone, and panic was there in its place. "But how can this be? The Colossus of Rhodes was overturned in an earthquake in 224 B. C. How can we see it standing there now? How can it really be there?"

HIS EYES were telling him one thing, that the statue was there, and his memory was telling him something else, that he had read in history that the statue had fallen in 224 B. C. He had also read in history that the enormous fragments of this fallen statue had remained where they fell for over eight hundred years,

at which time they had been sold as old metal to a junk dealer.

"The book says that this junk dealer used 900 camels to carry away the metal of this statue! If the statue fell, if 900 camels were needed to carry away the pieces hundreds of years later, how can we see it standing there now? Or am I the only one who sees it? Do you see it, Sylvia? Do you see it, Jed?" His voice was fierce. He was demanding information on what they saw. His purpose was to correlate their statements with his vision. If they saw the same thing he did, then possibly the statue was actually there. In which case some other solution must be sought.

"I think I see it, Bill. I swear I see it. I mean—" Something like panic sounded in Sylvia's voice too.

"It's there, all right!" Jed Franklin said. He stood with his feet firmly planted on the ground as if he was defying all the world to prove his eyes were lying. "I see it and I know I see it."

"Okay," Bill whispered. "I believe you. Then that means—"

Archimedes was literally jumping up and down and was spouting an excited string of Greek and English but again he was speaking too rapidly for them to understand him. "Time. Time." They caught the single word. "You pass through time. Curtain. Time."

"What's that?" Bill said.

Archimedes repeated it. Now they began to get the meaning of what he was saying. The meaning startled them almost as much as the sight of the statue. "Do you mean to tell me we have passed back through time?" Bill Bruck spoke.

"Yes. Yes. That's it." Archimedes beamed at them. "You got him, you hit nail on head. Pass through curtain. Only curtain not real curtain. Curtain was veil. You pass through

it, you come back here to my time."

Incredible and as impossible as it seemed, they could not doubt what he was saying. The gigantic statue stood there, backing up every word he spoke. They looked doubtfully at each other. Jed Franklin wiped sweat from his face. "I believe what I see," he said firmly. "I form conclusions from what I see. I see that statue. Because I see it I am willing to believe I have actually passed through time."

It took some minutes for the fact to penetrate their understanding. In fact, hours later, they would still be startled by what had happened, which would show in the way they took sudden sidelong glances at each other and at their surroundings, as if they didn't quite believe their own senses and wished ever so often to verify them by taking a quick look at things around them.

"Okay," Bill Bruck said. Another thought was in his mind, something that Archimedes had said—

"You said 'My statue?' What did you mean by that?"

THE GLOW on the chimpanzee face became a living thing. "I design it. I built it. You call me Archimedes. This is wrong, though I do not care what you call me. One name as good as another."

"Who are you?"

"Chares of Lindus," the little man answered.

"Great Lord in heaven!" Bill gasped. "But you were in our time. We knew you there."

"Make most sad mistake," Chares of Lindus said. "Experiment with time travel. Have enemy, want to get rid of enemy, think get rid of him by sending him forward in time. Work all right. Work too good. Also send myself forward in time. That why I was in your time. Make big mistake,

send myself forward too."

"But why didn't you come back?"

"Could not come back. In far future, in your time, everything had changed. World had changed, city had changed, Rhodes had changed. Could not even find ruins of old workshop. Was all covered up, all buried in hill which had not been there in my time. Somebody pile dirt on top of workshop, make regular mountain of dirt. I not know where to look to find shop, or even if shop is still there."

"Then that's why you were so interested in our excavations?"

"Sure thing. I think, you dig hole. maybe you find old workshop. I sure could not find him, but maybe you could. So I watch all time while you dig hole. You lucky, you find door of shop. Not till then did I know for sure that shop still existed. You help me, much."

On the face of the man they had called Archimedes, derisively, gratitude showed. Archimedes was really Chares of Lindus, one of the immortal artistic and scientific geniuses of all history. They were here with him, while the Colossus of Rhodes was still standing across the harbor entrance. Ancient peoples had called this Colossus one of the seven wonders of the world.

Just by looking out there into the falling night, they could see how right the ancient peoples had been.

"Come with me, I take you my home, I take damn good care of you," Chares said.

Darkness was falling fast over this ancient city. There were no street lights, no gas lights, no coal oil lanterns. All of these things belonged to the far future. In these times, the only sources of illumination at night was the fireplace, a smoky and inefficient oil lamp, torches, the moon and the stars.

As they moved forward in the growing darkness, suddenly ahead of them another form of illumination appeared, a broad beam of sharply defined light that suddenly appeared from nowhere, darted rapidly over the ground, then vanished.

"Hell on wheels, that was a flashlight if I ever saw one!" Jay Franklin said. "What kind of nonsense have you been giving us, Chares? They didn't have flashlights in the days when the Colossus was still standing."

His voice was heavy with suspicion.

"I know not have them," Chares said. "That flashlight, I agree. I see him in your time. But how would flashlight get here?"

"I think I can venture a guess," Bill Bruck said. "Skirmer had a flashlight."

"Skirmer!" The little artist jumped as if he had been touched by a live wire. "But Skirmer not here."

"I've got a hunch he is here," Bill said. "I got a hunch he came through the veil before you got it cut off. At least, he is the only man I can think of who might have a flashlight in this time. He had one when he forced us through the bronze door. If we see a flashlight here now, the chances are that Skirmer is the buck who is holding it in his paws."

In the silence that followed the only sound was the rattle of Greek words from the lips of Chares. They couldn't understand what he was saying, but it sounded as if he was swearing, in Greek. Then he was urging them again, in words they could understand.

"Come quick, come without noise. That Skirmer bad business in any time."

CHAPTER IV

CHARES' house was very near his workshop. He took them to it,

opened the door. Inside was darkness and the remnants of a fire flickering in a fireplace. They entered. Chares closed the heavy door behind them. Muttering an excited mixture of Greek and English, with perhaps some words from other and long-forgotten tongues, Chares built up the fire. From it he took a burning twig, which he lit something that he called a lamp.

"Very sorry no better lamp," he apologized. "Got much better in your time, no better in this."

The firelight and the smoky lamp threw flickering shadows on the walls, revealing swords, shields, spears, battle axes, and other instruments of war. On a wall shelf was a tall helmet adorned with a plume. The helmet was dented. Hanging from a hook below it was a half-suit of armor which also gave evidence of having been used. Bill Bruck's gaze roamed around the room.

"Hey, who was wearing that helmet when the dent was carved in it?"

"Me, I was," Chares answered. "Skirmer hit at me with sword, knock me half-way gone to hell."

"Skirmer, eh? Tell us more about him?"

"I know Skirmer because I fight with him, when young man, in battle. I remember him well. He belong to mainland people with which this city then fight war. That long ago, but I remember. No one else ever believe me, but I know." He wagged his head emphatically at this point, like a monkey reassuring himself as to the reality of his own memories. "Yes, I know. When Skirmer come here to this city, I see him, I know him, I know what he intend to do. He intend to capture this city, to take it by force. He is the enemy in our midst. He is working for the mainland people against which we fight so long ago."

"But didn't you tell anybody of this?" Jed Franklin questioned.

"Sure, I tell our ruler. He wise, kind man. He half-way believe maybe, but not sure. He say 'All is peaceful now. We do not wish war. Besides, if war should come, we have our secret weapon. We will do nothing which might start war.' Bah!" Chares snorted.

"Kind of like some people we know in our time, eh?" Bill said. "Because everything is peaceful now, they think it will remain peaceful forever. They stick their heads into a sack and think the enemy they cannot see will never harm them."

"Much like that," Chares said.

He produced food and they tried to eat. Sylvia, especially, had trouble with eating. "But what I want to know is--- Can we get back to our own time?"

At the question, Chares shook his head. "I not know, now. I not sure how curtain works. Maybe yes, maybe no. Nobody knows for sure how curtain works."

His words had a chilling effect. Were they forever marooned here in the past?

"Might be, might not be, no know," Chares said. "I sorry." His wrinkled face showed honest regret. "I not want to cause you trouble. I just not able to get curtain turned off quick enough." He spread his hands in a helpless gesture and the chimpanzee face showed signs of acute pain. He had hurt people who were his friends, he hadn't meant to do it, but he had done it, and he was sorry.

LATER HE showed them where they were to sleep. His first thought was that they could all sleep in the same room, even in the same bed. Sylvia promptly put him straight on that point. "Nonsense, Chares. I didn't come all the way back here to

sleep with two men. You find me a room of my own, one with a lock on the door." As she spoke, she grinned and glanced sideways at Bill Bruck and Jed Franklin.

"If one man is a good deal, why aren't two men a better deal?" Jed Franklin said, laughing.

Sylvia blushed. Chares found a room for her. There was no lock for the door, but there was something that served the same purpose, a heavy bar. They heard her drop the bar into place.

"Okay, wolves," her voice came from behind the door.

"What means this?" Chares inquired. To him, the whole situation made no sense whatsoever. "What wrong with women in your time?" he inquired.

"Aw, nothing is wrong with them," Bill Bruck answered. "They just got ideas, that's all."

"And what ideas!" Chares said, shaking his head. He went from room to room in the big house checking doors and shutters, making certain that everything was locked. The doors were made of thick planks and each had a heavy wooden bar as a lock. The shutters were also made of thick wooden slabs and each had its bar. The windows had no glass.

"I don't remember exactly when glass was invented," Jed Franklin said. "But it had certainly been invented before 224 B.C. However it was probably too expensive then to use in windows."

"Why do you select the date of 224 B.C.?" Bill questioned. "Is that the time we are in?"

"According to history, the Colossus of Rhodes fell in an earthquake in 224 B.C. I can't vouch for the accuracy of history on this point. But I know for certain that the Colossus is still standing. If it fell in 224 B.C., then we are earlier in time than that

date. That much is certain."

"How much earlier?"

"I'll guess with you," Jed answered.

They were still guessing with each other when both finally went to sleep.

CRASH!

The sound of splintering wood awakened them. Bill and Jed sat up.

"What the hell—" Jed muttered.

The sound came again, a heavy thud, followed by the crash of splintering wood. The room they were in was dark, there was no lamp, the door and the window were closed. Bill fumbled his way to the door, flung it open.

Out there in the big living room, the fire in the fireplace had died to a bed of coals which threw a dim illumination across the room.

Bill caught a glimpse of Chares, clad in a night garment of some kind, rush madly out of his room.

"Bill! Jed! Help!" Chares shouted three words. He rushed to the wall. From it he snatched a sword and a round shield.

"The door, the door!" he shouted again.

"Come on," Bill said to Jed.

As they entered the front room, the crash came again, from the stout planks of the front door. From outside came the sound of voices. The door shivered at the impact.

"Battering ram!" Chares yelled. "Skirmer!"

Wham! went the battering ram against the door again.

Bill grabbed a battle axe from the wall, Jed seized a spear.

The door of Sylvia's room opened and she appeared. "What's going on out here? What's all the commotion about? Why don't you let a lady sleep when she has a chance? Eek!" The last sound was a startled gasp as the battering ram hit the front door

again with a loud thump.

The door gave inward. The heavy wooden bar across it jumped up and down on its sockets. The ram was withdrawn.

Sylvia Ames took one look at the situation. Promptly she snatched a spear from its resting place on the wall.

Bill Bruck, seeing her action out of the corner of his eyes, grinned at her. "At a girl, Sylvia."

In this moment, he knew deep in his heart that she was quite a girl.

Crash! The battering ram hit again.

At the impact the bar jumped completely out of its sockets. And the door went down.

It went down with the screeching rasp of breaking hinges, the sound of stout planks being torn apart along the grain. Dust boiled up from the floor where it hit.

"Here they come!" Jed Franklin said.

THE MAN who stuck his face through the opening left by the fallen door had the hooked nose of a parrot, the swarthy brown face of a desert-ranging Arab, and the hot bold eyes of a hawk. He had golden rings in his ears and a red cloth wound around his head. He had a sword in his right hand and a shield caught carelessly in his left. He was as menacing and as supple and as deadly and as dangerous as a cobra.

The firelight glinted back from his eyes. Sword and shield ready, he moved into the room.

Behind him, pushing him forward, came a dozen others like him.

Chares, shouting an imprecation in unintelligible Greek, engaged him. Swords struck sparks from swords, swords rattled on shields, as Chares and the hook-nosed cobra pirate fought each other.

"Good gosh, look at that little devil fight!" Bill Bruck gasped.

Chares, who was both an artist and an engineer and who looked like a chimpanzee, was a hell-cat—in battle. He got the point of his sword under the shield of the hook-nosed cobra pirate, rammed it home, drew it out dripping blood, shoved the dying body backward, and screamed his defiance in Greek.

Behind the hook-nosed pirate, the other pirates came up.

Bill Bruck and Jed Franklin moved up and stood beside Chares.

"Hey, little man, we're here to help." Sylvia, behind them, was an Amazon out of the old time, an Amazon in shorts and halter and ready to fight. Out of the corners of his eyes, Chares threw an amazed glance at her.

"Now you see there is nothing wrong with the women in *our* time," Bill Bruck said.

"Okay by me, I agree," Chares panted. "Now we throw these jokers out!"

These jokers were the pirates pressing forward through the door.

Wham, crash. Sparkle steel, ring blade, crunch battle axe. The onslaught from the three inside the room was so fierce that the attackers were literally driven back. The spear, the battle axe, and the sword took their toll. Behind the three men Sylvia screamed encouragement and tried to get into the battle herself.

The pirates were forced back out through the door.

"Now quick, get door up again!" Chares gasped. "We got 'em licked, we keep 'em licked a little while, soon day comes, with daylight help come."

Voices shouted outside. The three moved off the fallen door and began hastily to lift it.

"Get it up, quick!" Chares shouted.

The shout changed abruptly into a scream, of sudden fear and sudden panic. From the darkness outside came a bright blinding beam of light. It struck Chares in the eyes and blinded him and he screamed involuntarily.

"It's only a flashlight," Bill Bruck said. "It can't hurt you."

"But this is no flashlight and it *can* hurt you," a voice said from outside.

Visible in the beam of the flashlight was a hand holding a gun. A German Luger! The sights were centered on the three men trying to lift the door.

"Drop that door or I blow hell out of you," the voice outside commanded.

The light and the hand holding the gun moved forward.

"Skirmer!" Chares yelled. He brought up his sword, started to crouch behind his shield and move forward.

Bill Bruck grabbed him. "Don't argue with that kind of a gun," Bill yelled. "It will shoot through your shield and through you too."

"That makes good sense," Skirmer said. "Give up or get killed. You take your choice."

The hand holding the gun was very steady. The tone of voice of the man holding the gun said he meant exactly what he said.

Bill Bruck dropped his axe and lifted his hands. Jed and the dazed Chares did likewise.

In Bill Bruck was the sinking feeling that Skirmer had come back to this time. He had brought a flashlight with him. And one other thing—a Luger.

In these days a single Luger would be more powerful than a regiment.

And Skirmer had the Luger, the only gun in existence in this time.

And Skirmer had them.

CHAPTER V

SKIRMER and the thugs behind him came piling into the room. One fact was immediately evident, the thugs were efficient. In almost no time at all they had Chares, Jed, Bill, and Sylvia's arms tied behind their backs.

Skirmer was examining Sylvia under the beam of the flashlight. A sound of satisfaction came from him.

"I hadn't really noticed you until now," Skirmer said. "Well. A little on the skinny side, maybe, but we can fatten you up. Well!" He laughed, a gloating throaty chuckle alive with sensual overtones. Sylvia shrank away from him.

"Don't you come any closer to me, you dirty dog," she said.

"Ah. Well, I surely wouldn't mind if you came close to me," Skirmer said, laughing.

"I'll never do that," the girl said firmly.

"But you might find you wanted to come close to me," Skirmer answered. "I remember a Circassian wench. She would never come close to me either, she said, when they brought her to my harem. But she did come close to me—when she got hungry enough." Again he laughed, a booming sensual sound that rolled through the room like the beating of a distant surf.

"Harem?" Sylvia whispered.

"Over that way," Skirmer answered, gesturing toward the mainland.

"Me in a harem?" Sylvia said.

"Sure. Why not? A little skinny maybe, but fine stuff, later."

Sylvia shrank away from him again, tried to move toward Bill Bruck. Bill, with fury rising to heights that he had not known existed in him, was struggling furiously to break the ropes that held his arms behind his back. Jed tried to stop him. "No, Bill, no.

Use your head."

"Head, hell!" Bill snarled. His hands would not come loose. He had only one weapon, his feet. He kicked upward, at Skirmer, as hard as he could swing his leg.

Skirmer caught the leg, yanked. Both of Bill's feet were pulled from under him. He hit the floor with a jarring crash that rattled every bone in his body. For a moment he was dazed, then the anger came boiling back in him.

"You wait, brother! There'll be another time!"

Skirmer laughed.

"Bill, keep your big mouth shut before you get it shut permanently," Jed Franklin begged, in a tone of voice that was full of meaning.

Bill Bruck caught that meaning. He fought the anger in him, got it under control, knowing that if he failed to get it under control, he might easily find himself in a spot where he could not help Sylvia. A dead man would be of no use to a living woman.

IN SINGLE file they were ushered out of the house. Outside was the dawn, cool and vaguely pink and very far away. In the darkness that still huddled over the city, the gigantic figure of the Colossus was visible. It stood with its broad back to the city, seeming looking for some enemy that might lie on the horizon. In its right hand was a torch in which the light of a flickering fire was dimly visible. Besides being ornamental, and one of the wonders of the ancient world, the Colossus obviously served as a lighthouse.

They were marched through silent, deserted streets. The inhabitants of this city slept until daylight. Or at least they stayed inside until then for the quite obvious reason that an honest citizen abroad at night could expect to meet only thieves and cut-

throats in his wanderings.

Skirmer and his men marched their prisoners to Chares' workshop. There they were met by others. The door of the shop had been forced open.

The only sound was Chares' muttered profanity.

"I move fast when I move," Skirmer said. "I take you and your shop too, both on the same night."

"Why you want my shop, why you want me?" Chares asked.

"For good reasons," Skirmer answered. "Get on in there, all of you." They were forced to enter. The heavy door swung shut behind them.

"Now," Skirmer spoke. "I want to know how this time veil works." He spoke in Greek but neither Bill nor Jed had any trouble understanding his meaning. The words were addressed to Chares.

"I not know what you mean." Chares spread his hands and the chimpanzee face assumed a doleful expression.

"You know exactly what I mean!" Skirmer exploded.

"Time curtain not work any more," Chares said. "I turn it off, for good."

"You can turn it on again."

"No. No can do."

"The hell you can't. You're going to." Skirmer spoke as if he meant every word. A fierce glitter appeared in the darting black eyes that seemed to see everything, and nothing. The glitter grew into a glow as hot as a burning coal.

"Why want to know about curtain?" Chares said.

"I'll tell you why!" The light in his eyes grew in intensity and his eyes became glittering flames. "I am going into the future and get weapons. Machine guns, hand grenades, maybe even cannon. With even one machine gun in this time, I can rule the world!"

Aghast, Jed Franklin and Bill

Bruck listened. As he spoke Skirmer began to stride up and down, like a caged panther, dreaming of the time when he would get out of the cage and wreak his vengeance on the creatures who had penned him in. And when this particular panther got out, he could do real damage.

One machine gun in 224 B.C. would be mighty enough to make the man who owned it ruler of the known world. Not only would a machine gun be murderous against troops advancing in close formation, but its psychological effect would be great enough to start a stampede that might never stop until the men who had faced it had actually run themselves to death. Men who had never heard a machine gun might be even more frightened by the sound it made than by the death that spewed from it. Death they knew, death from spear and sword and arrow, but the murderous rat-tat-tat of a machine gun in operation would seem to them to be the voice of a devil from hell.

Here in the operation of this time veil Skirmer had seen his chance to become emperor, despot, ruler of all men. Power! It was the one thing he really wanted. Power over other men.

"I am going to get what I want and neither you nor anybody else is going to stop me!" He pointed his finger at Chares as he spoke.

"No!" The single word that came from the lips of the little chimpanzee man was a wail of utter pain, of anguish that came straight from the heart. "No, no, I beg you."

"Show me how the time veil works."

Chares straightened himself and drew his body to its modest height.

"You go to hell," he said.

IN THAT moment he was not only Ajax defying the lightning, he was a pygmy Ajax, a little chimpanzee of a man standing against a giant of a

man who could crush him with one blow of the fist.

But as Chares spoke, he seemed to grow in stature.

"You go to hell," he repeated. "I tell nothing. No, never."

"Bravo," Sylvia spoke, involuntarily, then was hastily silent. It was easy to see where Sylvia's sympathies lay.

For an instant the lights in Skirmer's eyes seemed to glow like exploding flame. Then he veiled them.

"Well. You talk brave now. Let us see how long you will talk so brave." He made a gesture to one of his men. The fellow, another hawk-faced thug, moved forward, grinning. He held in his hands a pair of tongs.

At the sight of the tongs, Chares cringed. "No, no, not that."

"That!" Skirmer said.

Two men grabbed Chares and held him. They threw him to the floor, face down. His hands were already tied behind his back. One of the men jerked up a thumb so that Chares could not move it. The fellow with the tongs caught the thumb in that iron grip.

Chares screamed.

Sickness came up in Bill Bruck's stomach and he turned his head away. This was torture, the ordeal of the torn thumb. Unless Chares gave in, the thongs would twist and jerk and pull at the thumb until it was pulled from its socket, until finally it was literally pulled loose from the hand.

The fellow with the tongs grinned. He liked this. Away deep inside of him, he liked it. Skirmer licked his lips. He liked it too. Chares screamed and moaned and twisted.

"Do you give in?" Skirmer said.

"I not give in," Chares moaned.

"Twist it more," Skirmer said.

The tong man obeyed.

"Damn you, some day you will pay for this," Bill Bruck said thickly.

"Perhaps," Skirmer said. "But that

day is not now." He looked meditatively at them. "And you will never live to see it."

"Going to kill us, Skirmer?" Jed said quietly.

"I need helpers in my harem," Skirmer answered. "Soon my ships will take the girl to the mainland. You will be taken with her. You will be in my harem—as eunuchs."

As the meaning of the words came home to him, Jed Franklin quietly pitched forward on his face.

On the floor Chares moaned. "I give," he whispered. "I tell you what you want to know."

"Good!" Skirmer exulted.

"Only do not hurt my friends. If you hurt friends, I tell you nothing, show you nothing."

"You will tell me no matter who I hurt!" Skirmer said.

"I die first," Chares answered. And the way he spoke left no doubt that he meant what he said. "No hurt them, I tell. Hurt them—and I die. You make pick."

The tong man, at a gesture from Skirmer, left off his twisting of the thumb. But he kept the tongs ready for use in case he was ordered to do more torturing. Skirmer began to pace the floor, back and forth, like a caged panther trying to make up its mind which victim to kill next.

"All right," he said at last. "I won't harm them. I will send them to the mainland in my ship. If you keep your promise, they will be safe. If you fail me, you know what will happen to them."

"But you may not keep your word," Chares wailed. "You may lie, you may trick me and them."

"That is the chance you have to take," Skirmer answered. "If you do what I want, I may still do as I please with them. But you can be doubly damned certain what I will do to them if you don't work that time certain

for me."

He had the whip hand and he knew it. The loyalty of Chares to his friends was being used against both Chares and the friends.

"If you don't do what I want, it's sure death for you and worse than death for them. If you do what I want, maybe you and they will have a chance to live. Take your choice."

"I give," Chares said. "I do what you want."

"Good," Skirmer said.

On the floor, Jed Franklin moved and drew himself unsteadily to his knees.

"Are you all right?" Bill Bruck whispered.

"Right now, yes. But how long do you think I'll be able to say that?"

"Don't think about it," Bill Bruck said, shuddering.

CHAPTER VI

"TAKE THEM, lock them in my warehouse until I come," Skirmer said, gesturing toward the three Americans. "Get my fastest galley ready. We will leave soon."

With Chares remaining behind, the three Americans were marched out of the house. Outside the light was brighter now. They were in the time between dawn and sunrise. The Colossus was clearly visible in the growing light.

Sylvia seemed to find the sight of the Colossus fascinating, even at this moment. "I—I wonder if he—he could help us," she whispered.

"The Colossus help anybody?" Jed answered. "It's a hunk of brass."

"He was made in the image of the god, Apollo, the bright golden sun god," the girl answered. "And Apollo sometimes helped people."

"Are you out of your mind?" Jed said.

"I guess so," Sylvia said, confused.

"I guess I just feel that I'm in so bad a spot that only somebody as big as the god Apollo could help me now." Her voice sounded scratchy and broken. A catch and a throb were in it. "Bill, Bill, they're going to put—to put me—in a harem. Do you know what that means, Bill? Do you know?"

"They haven't got you in a harem yet, kitten," Bill Bruck answered. "They won't get you there as long as Jed and I are alive. Right, Jed?"

"That's right and it goes double," Jed Franklin answered.

"But what if—what if—what if you're *not* alive?" The catch in her words made her voice shake. "Oh, I can't say it, I can't even let myself think of you not being alive, Bill. I can't let myself think of anything like that."

She was crying now in great shaking sobs.

"Buck up, kitten," Bill said. "I've got a hunch it'll be a long time before I'm dead."

The girl seemed to believe him but deep in his heart he knew he was lying, to her and to himself. Deep in his heart he realized that his real feeling was that if he lived to see tomorrow, he would count himself as the luckiest man on earth.

Long before sun-up, they found themselves held prisoner in a stone warehouse on the waterfront. A six-foot giant wearing what looked to be a red bed-sheet wrapped around him was their guard. He stood just inside the door of the room, watched them with an unwinking gaze, and held suggestively ready in his right hand a curved sword that seemed to have a razor-sharp edge. Their hands were still tied behind their backs.

The room was empty, there was no place to sit except the floor. Bill Bruck sat down with his back against the wall. Sylvia sat down to one side

of him, Jed at the other.

"Hell of a hole we're in," Jed said. "Yesterday, or whatever yesterday would be in the time we're in now, we were just a couple of young archeologists griping because we had to dig a hole in the ground. Today we're in another kind of a hole right up to our necks." He shook his head.

Bill looked up at the giant guarding them. "I don't suppose Baby-face up there understands a word of English," he said.

"Not a chance," Jed answered. "English as we know it is a couple of thousand years ahead of him. You got something you want to say?"

"Yeah. The cords around my wrists have slipped a little."

"Huh?" Jed said quickly.

"Now don't go getting excited. I said they had slipped a *little*. I just thought I'd spend the day seeing if they won't slip a little more. If Baby-face seems to be watching me too closely, you get up and move around the room or something. Look out the window, maybe, examine the walls. Just do something so that he will watch you instead of me."

"I gotcha," Jed said.

Very quietly, Bill began to work with the cords that held his wrists. He saw sudden hope appear in Sylvia's face, knew it was an echo of the hope pounding in his own heart.

An hour later, he knew the hope was false. The ropes had slipped a little, then had failed to budge another fraction of an inch.

BY NOON the room had become hot and the air stale. Baby-face, at the door, had apparently decided there was no danger in these strangely dressed foreigners he was supposed to guard, and had sat down with his back against the wall. He was now dozing.

"That son-of-a-gun is going to sleep

as sure as shooting," Jed Franklin said.

"What good will that do us, if our hands are tied?" Bill answered bitterly.

Muffled voices sounded outside. Out there men were working. They were loading and unloading ships. The bump of bales of merchandise being dropped came to the ears of the three Americans inside, voices spoke in a strange mixture of languages, now and then a man laughed heavily. Once a woman laughed shrilly.

Outside, life was going on.

Inside, Bill and Jed and Sylvia tried frantically to loose the cords around their wrists. Tried and failed.

No food was brought them, no water.

"Apparently they don't care if we die of thirst," Sylvia said.

"They don't care if we die, period," Jed said.

The middle of the afternoon came. Jed got up and walked the floor. Baby-face roused sufficiently to watch him, indifferently. Jed sat down again. Bill's wrists were bleeding and he knew it but he kept on working. Perhaps blood might serve as a lubricant that would enable him to slip his hands through the loops in the cord.

An hour later, he knew that blood would not help a bit.

Night was coming. The room was already growing darker. Desperation rose in him. Across the room Baby-face gave out with an obvious snore.

"That son-of-a-eunuch is asleep. If we could only get loose now," Bill said. The sharp edge of the sword held loosely in the guard's limp hand caught his eye. That edge would cut a rope if he could only get to it.

If!

He knew if he touched the sword, the guard would awaken. He could not grab it because his hands were tied. He thought, desperately, of get-

ting it between his toes. Men who had lost their hands sometimes learned to eat with their toes. If he had only learned to do that! But he hadn't. He couldn't use his toes for such a purpose. Anyhow they were encased in stout leather shoes and he couldn't even unlace his shoes and take off his socks to get his toes free.

Couldn't, can't, don't know how, can't do anything! These words had never won a battle.

But what could he do?

Then the thought came. It came from nowhere. It was a nebulous, impossible, incredible thought. In any other circumstances he would have laughed at it.

But he didn't laugh at it now, because it was all he had.

He got slowly to his feet.

"What are you going to do?" Jed whispered anxiously.

"Shh!"

Very cautiously, taking care not to make a sound, he approached the sleeping guard.

Baby-face lay on his side with his head cuddled on his arm, his chin sticking out.

Bill took careful aim. If he missed this time, he would never get a second chance and he knew it.

With one mighty swing of his foot, he kicked the sleeping guard on the side of his chin.

NO TOE ever kicked a football harder on the kick-off than Bill Bruck kicked that chin. All his strength went into that single movement.

The stout leather toe of the shoe connected solidly.

Baby-face gasped, grunted, quivered, rolled over, shook, and stopped moving.

The single kick had knocked him from sleep straight into unconsciousness.

"Bill, Bill!" Sylvia whispered. "Bill, what the hell are you doing, he'll kill you?" Jed gasped.

Bill Bruck dropped quickly to his knees. Reaching down he caught the sword in one hand, fingered his way along to the hilt, grasped that and held it firmly.

"You don't have to use your toes to eat with," he muttered. "You can use 'em to kick with."

Neither of the other two understood even remotely what he meant. But they did understand his next words. "Jed, run the ropes on your wrists along the edge of this sword while I hold it."

"Got it, Bill," Jed Franklin answered.

A second later Bill could feel Jed trying to get the ropes on his wrists against the sharp edge of the sword. Jed grunted, swore under his breath, cursed again.

"Got it," he said, exultation in his voice. He stood up, the cut ropes dangling from his wrists, his hands free.

An instant later Bill Bruck felt the cords severed around his wrists. He was free, free, free! His heart jumped at the thought. It was the work of a moment to free Sylvia.

"We're loose!" Bill said.

"Yeah," Jed answered. "Loose all right, but we're still locked in this damned single room."

The window was a slit with iron bars running perpendicularly along it. A cautious examination revealed that the bars were firmly fixed in stone and would not come out.

Jed lifted Bill up to the sill of the window and he looked out. A single glance told him that a street ran outside the wall. It also told him that across the street a gang of ruffians were taking their ease. They were laughing and did not seem to be worrying about anything, but they were

also alert and watchful and were apparently waiting for something. Or for someone. Bill dropped back to the floor.

"Bunch of tough-looking customers out there," he said. "Even if we could get out the window, which we can't, we would only run straight into them. No dice this way."

"Which way, then?"

"I don't know that, yet, but we'll figure."

There was only one door, which Baby-face had guarded. Baby-face moaned and tried to sit up. They instantly took time to use the fragments of the cords that had been around their wrists to tie him up, knotting the short pieces of cord together. They also used a part of his own clothing to gag him. He was still practically unconscious and offered no resistance. Later, when he woke up, he would learn what had happened.

"I'd hate to be in his shoes when Skirmer catches him," Jed said.

"You couldn't be," Bill answered. "He isn't wearing shoes." He grinned. It was a bleak effort but Jed and Sylvia both managed weak smiles.

"I told you, kitten, we're not dead yet."

"Sure, I know it," she answered. "We'll lick 'em somehow, Bill; we'll get out of here."

"'At a girl."

If she was doing nothing else, she was certainly doing her part toward keeping his courage up.

WITH THE sword ready in his hand, Bill opened the door until a slit was visible. He applied his eyes to a crack. The harbor lay out there. In the distance the giant figure of the Colossus was visible. Smoke was beginning to appear from the torch, the flare was being lighted for the night. Ships at sea would see this fire and be guided by it.

Nearer at hand was a galley. The big rectangular sail was furled and the oars were neatly stacked. The galley slaves whose job was to pull on those oars were at their seats, looking disconsolate, sick, and weary. Seeing these men, the words "galley slave" took on new meaning for Bill Bruck.

A man, either a guard or one of the officers, lounged carelessly on the high stern of the ship.

From somewhere in the direction of the city came the confused sound of shouting. Somewhere in the city men were yelling. About what? Bill wondered.

"I'll dress up in his clothes and march you two out of here," Bill said, gesturing toward Baby-face to show whose clothes he meant.

"Do you think it will work?" Sylvia said.

"I don't know. But we can try. We may get by with it simply because nobody is expecting it. If you have any better ideas—"

"I don't have any ideas at all," Jed said. "Except that I have an idea we had better get to hell out of here, the quicker the better."

They stripped Baby-face's red sheet from him. Bill rolled up his pants legs, wrapped the sheet around him. He rubbed his hands in the dust on the floor, smeared it on his face.

Looking at the final result, Jed said. "I don't know who looks tougher, you or Baby-face."

They moved to the door, opened it quietly, and stepped out, Jed in the lead, then Sylvia, then Bill. The sword firmly clutched in his right hand, Bill kept his head down and stalked doggedly ahead.

They were out.

Off in the distance the sounds of shouting had grown louder as if those responsible were coming closer.

CHAPTER VII

THE GUARD on the high stern platform of the galley looked curiously at them, seemed for an instant as if he was going to call out a challenge, then shrugged and changed his mind. His job was to watch the slaves seated at the oars of the galley, not to watch out for lunatics in strange clothes walking along the wharf.

They reached the end of the warehouse. A narrow alley that started at the water front and extended up to the street was in front of them. The building on the opposite of the alley extended from street to waterfront.

"Once we get through this alley, we're in the main city," Jed said, scanning the situation. "Once we're in the city, they'll have a hell of a time catching us. There's nobody in the alley."

"Then head right into it," Bill said.

As they started to turn the corner, the sound of shouting came nearer, then abruptly went into silence as a sharp explosion sounded.

"Hey, what's that?" Jed said.

"Sounded like a shot to me," Bill answered. "But who could be shooting a gun here?"

An instant later, as he realized who might be firing a shot here, he said. "Hurry up and get out of this alley, fast!"

Ahead of him, Sylvia and Jed broke into a run, then stopped abruptly. In the alley ahead of them a whole horde of figures had appeared. Some of them Bill vaguely recognized as the men he had seen on the street when he had looked through the window. Others he had never seen before. But they were coming along the alley straight toward them.

"Quick, get up against the wall and maybe they won't spot us," he said.

Jed and Sylvia obeyed. It was a wild hope, but it was the only hope they had.

The foremost of the group were upon them. They were trotting, talking, and looking back over their shoulders. They glanced curiously at the three Americans—and went on by.

"They *didn't* notice us," Sylvia whispered, hope in the tones of her voice.

"Shh! Another bunch is coming."

The second group had turned the corner and were heading into the alley. Bill, Sylvia, and Jed stood stiff against the wall, each trying to make himself as small and inconspicuous as possible. "Look at the ground," Bill whispered. "They'll be less likely to notice us if they don't see our faces."

He was repeating here something that every soldier who had ever found a strafing plane overhead knows to be true, as long as you stand still and don't look up, you are harder to see than if you are moving and if you have your face turned up.

Hardly daring to breathe, they heard the group come down the alley. One man went past them, two more men. With an exclamation of startled surprise, the third man stopped.

"What's this?" he snapped, in Greek.

Bill Bruck didn't have to look up to know who was there.

Skirmer! It was Skirmer who had spoken and Bill would recognize that voice anywhere. He couldn't begin to guess what Skirmer was doing here in this alley, apparently heading for the waterfront on the dead run, but Skirmer it unmistakably was.

With lifting his head, Bill Bruck struck viciously upward with the sword.

A gun exploded. A bullet went over his shoulder and knocked chips of stone from the wall behind him.

Skirmer danced backward, dodging

the sword.

"Help!" he yelled.

"We've got to get out of here, fast!" Bill said.

FROM THE direction of the street more men were appearing. There were at least ten of them. Bill started toward them, stopped, took a quick glance toward the water.

In that direction the way was clear. Except for Skirmer who was leaning against the opposite wall, his face bloody from a gash across one cheek, and apparently trying hard to catch his breath, there was no one to stop them. Although Skirmer still held the gun, he was apparently not ready to use it.

"Head for the water," Bill yelled. "Jump in and swim!"

As they ran along the alley toward the wharf, ducking low to dodge any possible bullets, they could hear Skirmer laughing almost insanely.

Sylvia went first, diving like a seal. Jed followed, feet first. Galleys were moored here, and they could swim under water and around the galleys and escape. Bill dived.

He hit with a splash, went down, down, down, swimming under water in a direction away from the nearest galley. His gasping lungs forced him to the surface, he took a deep breath and a quick look, and dived again.

The quick look told him that near him Jed and Sylvia were already going down again. All three could swim and swim well. Bill had no fear for their safety on that account. But the quick look also gave him the sight of something that did cause him concern. a long rowboat shooting out from behind one of the galleys, heading toward them swift and straight, with a man standing up in front of the boat and four brawny slaves at the oars.

When his lungs forced him to the

surface again, the sound of Sylvia's ripping scream was shrill in his ears.

He caught just a glimpse of her. The boat had caught up with her. While the four slaves at the oars expertly backed away and held the boat steady, the man in the bow had reached down and caught Sylvia by the hair.

Now, like a dripping mermaid, she was being dragged into the boat by her hair.

She was fighting, struggling, screaming, twisting, writhing. The man who held her was laughing and pulling. And she was coming out of the water, every contour of her lithe form revealed by the clinging shorts and blouse she was wearing.

With murder rising in his heart, Bill swam toward her.

Thwack!

An oar came down across the top of his head. He didn't see the oar coming, didn't know it was coming until it hit. A constellation of exploding novae flashed before his eyes.

Vaguely conscious, almost suffocating from the water he had drawn into his lungs, Bill was aware that he was also drawn into the boat, dumped unceremoniously into the bottom, where he choked, gagged, and was sick.

AROUND him voices laughed. Commands were called out. He knew vaguely what was going on. The boat was running down Jed. He was too sick and too stunned to care much what happened. Dimly he heard Jed overhauled, heard again the solid thump of the oar coming down on a skull.

Again a gasping wet body was dumped in the bottom of the boat. Now the rhythm of the oars picked up in a steady beat and Bill knew the boat was returning swiftly to the galley. By the time it had reached

the galley he had recovered enough to sit up.

He was wet, sick, miserable. And one other thing—he was also in the toughest spot of his life. From here on out, only something in the nature of a miracle could save him.

Sylvia was a huddled, limp body in the bottom of the boat. He could hear her sobbing.

"Kitten.... Kitten.... It'll be all right," he muttered.

"I—I—" She couldn't speak.

Jed, hair plastered on both sides of his head and blood running down over his face, was sitting up.

"Up into the galley," a harsh voice ordered, in Greek.

Above them, coming down over the bow of the ship, was a rope ladder. They went up it one by one. Below them, the man who had captured them laughed, prodding them with the point of his sword to make them move faster.

"I've got him on my list," Jed said grimly, if futilely.

"Down in the bottom of the galley and wait there," they were ordered.

They obeyed. On both sides of them, the galley slaves watched from sick, patient, uninterested eyes. Bill saw for the first time that each slave was chained to his position by a short length of stout chain running from the ankle to a heavy plank that formed a part of the galley itself.

"My God!" he thought, and was sick again.

They waited. Skirmer was up above them on the wharf angrily shouting orders. By craning their necks they could see him. They saw men go into the warehouse where they had been held prisoner and come out dragging Baby-face by the hair. Baby-face was still tied but he was conscious now. The men ripped the gag from his mouth. Words in a pleading unbroken stream poured from his lips.

"I don't care how it happened," Skirmer said, in Greek. "You were told to guard them. And you let them escape."

"He's talking about us," Jed whispered.

"And giving Baby-face hell for letting us escape," Bill said. "Oh!" The single gasped syllable came from his lips as he saw what happened next.

Skirmer made a gesture to one of the men standing behind Baby-face. At the gesture, Baby-face screamed. The man behind him drew his sword. With a single double-handed downward lick he drove the edge of the blade completely through the guard's skull.

Baby-face's scream died in a shrill yell. His body kicked and jumped. As if he was so much carrion, the man who had split his skull kicked his quivering body off the edge of the wharf. A sullen, heavy splash sounded.

Up on the high stern, the guard of the galley slaves laughed.

Down in the bottom of the galley three people simultaneously hid their heads in their hands.

Skirmer came into the boat. He lumbered down to them. He was both angry and pleased. The Luger pistol ready in his hand, he looked them over.

"That damned Chares, he double-crossed me," Skirmer said. "Or he almost did. But not quite. No, not quite." He laughed and spat in the face of the nearest galley slave. The slave seemed to be unaware that anything unusual had happened to him.

"What happened to Chares?" Bill said.

"I don't know," Skirmer answered. "I made him set the time veil in operation. We both went up from the basement to inspect it. Before I knew what he was doing, he dived

through it." A string of oaths came from his lips at this point.

"Ah," Bill said.

"I went through it after him," Skirmer continued. "He went into your time, ducked straight back into this time like a rabbit heading for his hole. He got back into this time before I could catch him. He got out of his workshop before my men could catch him. Like a snake, he squirmed through their legs. He got away, he went straight to the ruler of Rhodes. He sent troops under his command to catch me."

"We heard something that sounded like a fight in the city," Jed said.

"That was the troops chasing me and my men," Skirmer said. "They almost caught us!" He seemed outraged at the very thought of that. "They might have caught us, but I used this!" He gestured with the pistol. "It stopped them. They had no stomach to face this. They are up there now somewhere, trying to reorganize. While they are doing that. I will sail quietly out of the harbor and go to the mainland."

"I see," Bill said. He both saw and didn't see. He liked neither what he saw nor what he didn't see. "And what about us?"

"Ah, there is where I catch Chares again," Skirmer said. "I have got you—and you are his friends. He will either do what I say or—" Blood made his face a grim mask but there was no mistaking the expression was a leer, directed straight at Sylvia. "Or else I will have you," he said.

"You'll go to hell first—" Bill started to say, and tried to get to his feet. Jed held him down.

Skirmer laughed. Again he spat in the face of the nearest galley slave.

He lifted his voice in an order.

The galley was shoved away from the wharf. As the orders rang out, the galley slaves unshipped their oars

and began a slow, methodical beat that moved the galley through the water at an ever-increasing rate.

Like some uncouth bird, the galley was moving out of the harbor, taking Bill and Sylvia and Jed with it.

CHAPTER VIII

"I'M NOT GOING to the mainland," Sylvia whispered, her face white. "I'll go over the side first."

"Kitten, please!" Bill begged.

"I mean it," she answered.

The tone of her voice and the set of her jaw told Bill that she meant what she said. Desperation rose in him. What could he do? He had to do something, but what?

"Only the Golden God can save us now," Sylvia whispered. Her eyes lifted to the gigantic statue of the Colossus and her lips seemed to move in prayer.

The galley was moving across the inner harbor toward the opening between the two gigantic legs of the statue. People were moving leisurely along the circling walls that led out to the sea gate. Galleys and fishing boats were moored in the inner harbor. In the west the rim of the sun had already dipped below the edge of the horizon.

"I'll do it tonight," Sylvia whispered, as if to herself. "I'll go over as soon as it gets dark."

"Sylvia!" Bill whispered.

She did not answer, did not seem to hear him. Her eyes were fixed and glassy, bright with an unnatural luster.

Directly ahead of them, on the broad walk that ran between the rows of slaves on both sides of the galley, Skirmer stood looking up at the statue. His attention was fully concentrated on it. His right hand hung down by his side. His fingers gripped the Luger

lightly but in readiness.

Bill Bruck rose to a half crouch, hurled himself at Skirmer, his fingers snatching desperately for that gun held so lightly.

Skirmer heard the sound of the movement, started to turn. Bill's hurtling body hit him, Bill's clutching fingers grabbed for the gun. Skirmer was knocked down, the gun was knocked out of his hand. Bill, trying to grab it as it fell, missed.

It went down into the section where the slaves were working at the oars, bounced from the bare knee of a brawny slave, who jumped as if a snake had struck him, stared at the gun, stared incredulously upward at anybody who had the courage to tackle Skirmer.

Both fore and aft in the galley men were crowded, Skirmer's men. At the sound of Bill's body striking Skirmer, they turned startled eyes in that direction.

As the gun fell into the bottom of the galley, Skirmer spat out a startled oath. Bill paid no attention to him. He dived for the gun.

The slave yelled, jerked his legs away, tried to kick at Bill, forgot all about rowing. From the back of the boat a whip cracked—the slave master's instant reaction when one of the rowers forgot his duty for even a second.

Bill clutched for the gun.

The slave kicked him in the face.

THE FORCE of the blow from the hard callus on the bottom of the unshod foot seemed to splatter Bill's nose all over his face. It knocked him backward and he knew his nose instantly spurted streams of blood, knew also that this did not matter, knew that only one thing mattered, to get that gun!

He dived under the slave's legs, got his fingers on the gun, got his hand

around the butt, clutching the grip of the weapon as if he was clutching life itself.

As he got his fingers on the gun, the surprised Skirmer, finally gaining his footing and realizing what was happening, jumped at him.

Skirmer's method of attack was simple. Bill was below him, Bill was on his knees and his back was exposed. When Skirmer jumped, his firm intention was to land on both feet right in the middle of that exposed back.

At which point, the spine would snap and Bill would be paralyzed.

Bill did not see him jump, did not know he had jumped. Bill was busy grabbing for the butt of the gun.

Two people saw Skirmer jump. Jed and Sylvia. Both reacted instantly, to leap at Skirmer and try to stop him. Both reacted—too late.

A third person saw him. The slave at the oar. To the slave this situation was mad beyond all his knowledge of madness. He reacted as an animal, by kicking out with both feet at Skirmer.

Trying to catch himself, Skirmer fell on the slave. He fell on Bill Bruck too, but it was only a glancing blow. Skirmer's feet did not strike Bill's back, Bill's spine did not snap under the power of that blow.

For an instant, Bill felt himself being crushed as Skirmer and the slave tried to disentangle themselves. Bill squirmed, pointed the gun upward over his left shoulder, pulled the trigger. Everybody up there was his enemy, anyway.

The gun roared like a cannon.

Bill didn't hit anybody. By some miracle, the slug passed between Skirmer and the slave, missing both of them. But the sound of the sudden explosion accomplished roughly the same effect as the slug insofar as the slave was concerned. It literally paralyzed him from fear. He went

limp and fainted.

Skirmer leaped free. Bill shoved the body of the slave off him and came to his face. In that moment, with blood running down across his face, hair plastered to his head, his clothes soaking wet, a gun in his hand, he must have presented a wild sight. At least Sylvia, seeing him, screamed. Both Sylvia and Jed stopped their charge toward Skirmer.

And Skirmer must also have thought the man facing him looked wild indeed. A look of fear appeared on Skirmer's face, the first time Bill had ever seen this man show any sign whatsoever of even knowing the meaning of the word.

Lifting his hands, Skirmer backed away.

"Stand still," Bill said.

Skirmer stood still.

THE GALLEY was passing through the harbor gate, directly between the legs of the statue as this happened. Bill glanced over at Sylvia, a look which said, "You don't need any help from Apollo when I'm around," then kept his eyes fastened on Skirmer.

"Order this galley to turn around," he said.

"But—"

"Do as I say or I'll kill you!"

Bill Bruck meant exactly what he said. He had no desire under any circumstances to shoot down an unarmed man but he would shoot this one down with no compunction.

Skirmer looked at him—and laughed.

Bill stared at Skirmer, not believing his own ears. Had the man gone stark raving mad? Had the same thing happened to Skirmer as had happened to the slave when the latter heard the gun go off?

"Watch him, Bill, he's up to something," Jed yelled.

"I'm watching him," Bill answered. Skirmer laughed and leaped at Bill, leaped straight at the muzzle of the gun.

Bill pulled the trigger. At this range he could not miss. The slug would blow a hole straight through Skirmer.

The slug did not blow a hole through Skirmer.

The gun did not explode.

"That was the last shell in the gun," Skirmer shouted goadingly.

Bill threw the empty gun straight in his face and closed with him.

He struck one blow, a heavy lashing jab from his left fist, on the point of Skirmer's jaw. Skirmer simply ducked his bullet head and kept coming. Bill Bruck was borne backward and down among the yelling screaming slaves.

As he fell he caught one glimpse of Jed on the way to help him, caught another glimpse of a horde of Skirmer's men coming from both ends of the boat to knock Jed down and to come on to help Skirmer.

"This is it," he thought hopelessly. "This is it. We're licked."

A club landed on the top of his head and blackness closed in around him again.

He wasn't unconscious long. When his mind began to stumble back up from the bottomless pit into which it had been plunged he knew he was lying again on the runway down the middle of the galley, knew also that many people were standing around him, knew that all of these people seemed literally stunned, as if they were witnessing an event of such magnitude that they had no time to think of anything else.

He wondered what could be holding their attention so firmly.

"Earthquake?" he thought. "Tornado, battleship, maybe?" The idea of a battleship was foolish and he knew it. No battleships as he knew them existed back here in this time.

Battlewagons were two thousand years in the future.

Yet he got the dazed impression that the people around him were seeing something as stupendous as the sight of a battleship would have been to them.

Something, no matter what it was, was happening. And that something, whatever it was, was extremely awe-compelling. All around him he could hear men catching their breath. Even the galley slaves had forgotten to pull on their oars and were sitting, awe-struck, in their seats, staring as if they were seeing the figure of Death itself approaching them.

Sylvia screamed. "The statue is moving!"

BILL BRUCK heard the words, but in his dazed state he did not consider them to be real. "She's gone nuts," he thought. "She's been yapping that we are in such a tough spot that only the god Apollo could help us. She must think he *is* going to help us."

Then another voice shrilled. "That damned Colossus *is* moving!" This time it was the voice of Jed Franklin.

This voice made Bill Bruck pay attention. Even if Sylvia was out of her mind, Jed probably wasn't. Therefore—Bill hastily jerked his head around to see what was happening, to see what sight held frozen all eyes on the galley.

At first, his dazed impression was that he was really nuts now.

"The damned Colossus is moving!" he gulped.

The galley was swinging and still moving from the impetus given it before the startled slaves left off their rowing. Above it in the dusk the tall figure of the Colossus was clearly visible.

The Colossus was actually moving! The knees were bending, the head was tilting to stare downward, one

hand was forming itself into a gigantic fist.

The great face was peering down as though seeking on the surface of the sea some enemy of which it had just become aware. The golden body gleamed in the light of the dying day. The great eyes seemed to be open, searching, peering—for something. Bill had the definite impression that something resembling smoke spurted from the nostrils.

"What the hell is going on here?" Bill Bruck gasped.

In his mind the wild thought flashed, a statue can't move. The Colossus was a statue made in the image of the golden god, Apollo, and such a statue could not move.

But it *was* moving.

The sight of it moving was enough to freeze the body to inaction, as the sudden thunder of the gun had startled and shocked the galley slave out of his mind.

Then the statue seemed to see at last what it was seeking. The gaze seemed to concentrate—on the galley.

The mouth opened. There roared from it, in sudden full blast, the brazen clamor of a thousand trumpets, a thundering blast of sound that seemed to still the very surface of the sea and to set wild echoes flooding back from the depths of the sky overhead.

The sound was a roar and a blast and a shout and a scream. In it the perfect warrior roared his defiance of the enemy, the war horse added his shrill neigh, swords clashed on shields, men screamed as they died, and at the same time a thousand trumpets blasted out their orders to whole armies to charge.

It hurt the ears, it set the head rattling, it made the very bones jump in their sockets. And as the original blast died away, echoes flung it back again and again and again, until it seemed as if the whole world, the

earth, the sea, and the sky, vibrated in unison with a single thunder of sound.

As the sound died away the statue started to bring down that monstrous fist.

Skirmer screamed an order to the slaves, screamed it too late.

THE FIST struck the galley, smashed it, knocked a great gaping hole in it, reduced it to splinters. Chained to their positions, the slaves set up a shrill chorus of screams. Death in the form of rushing water was coming at them and they knew it and they screamed in horror and in fear.

Bill Bruck grabbed Sylvia.

"The galley's sinking," he yelled. "Jed, look to yourself."

As the water came at them, something else happened. Up above them the gigantic statue was trying to lift the mauled fist for another blow. But the fist wasn't going up. It hung in the air, caught, unable to move. A tremor passed up the mighty arm. The whole statue seemed to vibrate.

Again, but this time seemingly unintentionally, the blast of sound roared from the statue.

It was cut short. It ended abruptly, almost on a note of pain.

And as it ended, tremor after tremor began to pass over the statue.

It lurched, it twisted, it began to fall.

One leg came unfastened from its moorings, the other held. As a result the gigantic Colossus was thrown to one side.

If this Colossus was Apollo, the god was now a falling god.

If Colossus had fallen straight forward, he would have struck the already sinking galley and would have carried it to the bottom of the sea beneath his giant bulk and weight.

But the twisting action as he fell threw him to one side. He missed the

galley. But he hit the sea like a mountain falling and the wave thrown up on both sides instantly leaped high into the air.

It came toward the sinking galley like a tidal wave following an earthquake.

The galley was thrown up and away. The wave went over it, burying it beneath hundreds of tons of sea water.

The galley did not rise again. With it to the bottom of the sea, carried helplessly to their doom, were the slaves who had once toiled at its oars. They went with no hope of being saved, went down to death, possibly with no real regret. To most of them death must have been a welcome release from the life they had lived.

The wave of water caught Bill Bruck and Sylvia, rolled over them in a monstrous flood. In spite of everything he could do to prevent, the power of the water tore the girl from his arms. Then all Bill knew was that he was swimming, fighting a desperate battle to get to the surface himself.

An eon passed and another began while he tried to swim upward. He was aware of water hurling him onward, throwing him with more violence than he could overcome, he was aware also of straining arms and threshing legs as he tried to fight his way to the surface. But most of all he was aware of lungs threatening to burst.

He could not hold his breath another second. He knew he had to hold it, that to breathe now was to go join the galley slaves already diving downward to the bottom of the sea. Flashes of red pain passed before his eyes, he was certain his straining lungs were going to burst.

He forced them not to burst, forced them for another minute that seemed an eternity, forced them for another second, forced them again and—his head broke the surface.

Nothing had ever tasted too good to

him before as that single gulping mouthful of air he sucked into his lungs. Life, air was life. Air was here! He had air. The wave was still carrying him. He let it bear him.

Something flung itself to the surface at his elbow, popping eyes saw him, long arms were instantly flung around him.

Skirmer!

SKIRMER had come to the surface here. Bill felt Skirmer grab him, knew from the feel of that panic-stricken clutch that he had a drowning man on his hands. He struck one hard blow at Skirmer's chin. The blow had no effect.

Skirmer's arms closed around him and they both went under the surface.

Nothing that had happened before had been quite as desperate as this. Death had him tightly held in its skeleton's arms and was dragging him under the surface. No drowning man will let go as long as he has reason to think that the object to which he clings so desperately may save his life.

Bill Bruck struggled, tried to get his arms in position to break Skirmer's grip, found he could not move his arms.

Found he could do nothing to save himself.

In that mad moment panic rose thunderingly in him. The thought flashed through his mind: "Did I come back here to die?"

Unless he could do something, and do it fast, he realized he had come back here to die, knew also that death was only a matter of a couple of minutes away.

Knew there was nothing he could do about it.

Except one thing.

He did that one thing. He ceased struggling, he let Skirmer bear him down, down, down.

Down and farther down and farther down.

Down without a struggle, down like a lifeless thing sinking into the sea without resistance. Down like a rock heading straight for the bottom.

Skirmer, in the mad panic that was in him, sensed that this lifeless thing was taking him straight to the bottom too. Sensing this, Skirmer hastily let go his hold and tried to walk his way upward on water.

With a mighty kick of both feet, Bill Bruck shoved himself away from Skirmer and fought his way to the surface again.

Again he gasped in air. But this time he watched for Skirmer.

Skirmer did not come up. A burst of bubbles came flashing upward, evidence of the end of some violent struggle far below. Evidence also of the end of Skirmer, dying there with his galley slaves.

Bill tread water, using only enough energy to keep himself afloat. The wave, he saw, had carried him near shore. People were moving there on a rocky beach. He caught a glimpse of one person still swimming.

Sylvia, looking for him!

"Here, I am, kitten, here I am."

Together they swam slowly to the shore. Jed found them, joined them, swam with them. They sank down on the rocks, exhausted, worn to the edge of death itself. Eventually they began to get their strength back.

"That damned Colossus actually struck at that galley," Jed gasped. "It actually moved."

"I saw it," Bill answered. "I don't begin to understand it."

NEAR THEM somewhere a man was weeping. They moved slowly toward him.

"Hell, it's Chares!" Jed gasped, recognizing the chimpanzee face in the quickly gathering dusk.

"My statue, my Colossus, gone," Chares was wailing.

"How'd you get here? Where'd you come from?" the astonished Jed said.

"I was in Colossus, in the image of the golden god," Chares explained. "I was making him strike Skirmer's galley, I was trying to save you, when something went wrong, and he tumbled into the sea. Where did I make my mistake? Where—" Again he began to weep.

"Let me get this straight," the astonished Bill Bruck said. "*You were making Colossus move?*"

"But, of course," Chares said. "He was designed to move and to strike the ships of any enemies who dared approach. He was also designed to make a terrific noise, to frighten the enemies."

"What?"

Chares nodded. "Of course. But something—"

"Lord in Heaven, was Colossus your secret weapon?"

"But, of course," Chares said. "He was a gigantic statue, he was also a secret weapon to protect us. But something went wrong. I do not know what it was. I hurried down to put him in motion as soon as I realized Skirmer would try to carry you away. I had him ready to strike. I made him strike, I made him give out the frightful sounds. But—" He spread his hands in a gesture of resignation and defeat.

"Colossus was a secret weapon and he has fallen," Jed said softly. "And now at last I know where we are in time?"

"Where?"

"In 224 B.C." Bill answered. "That was the year in which Colossus fell. We have just watched him fall. Therefore we are in that year."

"But the earthquake, or some earthquake, destroyed Colossus. It's in the histories," Bill protested.

"But, of course," Jed said, mimicking the words of Chares. "The historians had to have some reason for

the fall of Colossus. Since they didn't know the real reason, they had to invent one. They invented an earthquake. Simple, eh?"

"Okay, if you say so," Bill said. "But the next question is: can we get back to our own time?"

"But, of course," Chares answered. "I send you back, then close the veil forever. When you get back to your time, you dig into the workshop of Chares, you find nothing but old bronze, and dust, and ruins."

They were silent. They felt his pain. He had created Colossus and Colossus had fallen.

"Tomorrow I send you back?" Chares said, gently. "The next day, maybe? You stay here a day or two. No danger now that Skirmer is gone. But not send you back tonight. I am too tired to work the time veil again."

"No, not tonight," Bill answered. "Nor tomorrow either. By tomorrow night we ought to be rested."

Tucking Sylvia's arm in his, he helped her along the stones to the steps that led upward to the curving causeway. In his mind was the thought of tomorrow night.

THE END

SOLAR OVEN



By Carter T. Wainwright



A LONG WITH attempts to grub into the nature of low temperatures, scientists have an extreme curiosity about high ones. And in recent times, they've been learning a lot. While unquestionably the atomic bomb provided the hottest man-made temperatures on Earth, that "gad-ged" is ruled out because once you've got the temperature you can't do anything with it! You can't build a lab inside an atomic bomb!

But there are plenty of other ways of making a scientific hotfoot: the highest temperature job being done some years ago when technicians shot high-voltage, high-amperage currents through small wires. The terrific charge of energy simply exploded the wires into vapor with a recorded temperature of close to thirty-five thousand degrees! Brother, that's hot! But again this was a case of merely obtaining the temperature. Once you got it, you couldn't boil a pot of coffee.

The conventional means of getting hot spots are satisfactory for some purposes; the oxy-acetylene torch which puts out a temperature of six thousand degrees is good; so is the electric arc which gives out with sixty-six hundred degrees. The researchers with the miraculous element fluorine can get temperatures of seventy-five hundred degrees by merely bringing a jet of the stuff together with a jet of hydrogen.

But there are certain refractory materials which don't even succumb under such temperatures. The search for the ultimate continues. Finally a number of technicians,

both here and abroad have gone back to Man's oldest furnace, the burning glass, for heat! And this is real heat!

The ancients used lenses and mirrors for concentrating the Sun's image in a small space and getting powerful burning effects. Modern scientists, using parabolic searchlight mirrors are able to concentrate the size of the Sun's image from a six foot mirror into a spot no more than a quarter inch in diameter. The results are amazing. At that focal point the Sun's image gives out with a temperature of almost ten thousand degrees! This is good enough to vaporize all known substances. It has enabled men to fuse and melt materials which before would turn fluid under no circumstances.

A good deal of the research is being done in France with surprisingly limited equipment consisting of an abandoned German anti-aircraft searchlight and a few other odds and ends. But like any experiment where real concern is evinced, equipment isn't the whole story. Brains take the place of complex apparatus and the result is that these boys are doing first rate work.

The work is important especially in connection with refractory materials for jet and rocket engines. It also points out that the Sun may still be regarded as a potential energy source. Certainly it is an ever available furnace for experiments like these. It may be questionable to expect Solar energy to ever do much of the world's work, but as a research instrument it's perfect. Get hot, Sun, get hot!

BRAIN CATALOG!



By H. R. Stanton



THE UNITED STATES is slowly preparing to action on one of its most valuable resources—brains! It's about time too. In spite of all the modern science and scientific advances which we possess, those advances can become quickly obsolete unless we work continually upon them. In other words, applied science as well as pure science, never stands still. Obviously science calls for scientists and that is a resource in which we're particularly rich at present. But unless the government takes cognizance of that fact, we may find ourselves beaten in the race for brains.

An authority of scientists is attempting to get an agency to catalog and locate all of the few hundred thousand persons whose technological and scientific ability is without question. Along with these minds, advanced students and certain critical technicians should be filed too. Then, when

and if a war comes, the government will be able to assign talent where it is needed. The second World War had too many scientists peeling potatoes and too many KP's working in the laboratory. In spite of the fact that there wasn't a complete unified policy we did pretty well. We may not have a chance to do so well this time. It must be remembered too that we had enormous European resources to draw brains from too.

Scientific talent doesn't mean that one should be exempted from any of the privations and sufferings anyone else endures, but for sheer survival's sake it is necessary to realize that you can't replace or develop scientific skill at a moment's notice.

So if you're an advanced physicist, or a super technician, make sure you're located where you'll be doing the most advantageous work. Calling all brains!...

JUMP INTO SPACE!



By J. R. Marks



SO FAR you can't get off the planet. The rockets haven't yet been built. The "mind's eye" is all we can use. But sometimes that, coupled with imagination, is enough to rock a man to the core.

If you've never done it, and you want a genuine thrill, get hold of a Geiger counter, such as is used for uranium prospecting. Put the headphones to your ear, and in a second you'll be wandering in the depths of the Universe! Of course, it'll be only in the mind, but it's real enough at that.

Actually all you hear when you listen to a Geiger-Mueller counter is a series of slow irregularly spaced clicks—nothing more. But your mind tells you a lot about what's happening. Each time you catch one of those clicks, that means that a single high-energy atomic or sub-atomic particle has blasted into the Geiger tube and caused an electrical discharge. That particle or wave has been hurtling across incredible reaches of space, shocking to contemplate.

It doesn't sound like much in the telling. So what do you say. Just a bunch of clicks. Ah, but once you've listened. It's like tuning in on the universe. Sometimes you get a chilly feeling just thinking that it's possible. Probing the universe with a headphone...!



THE WEEKLY BLUES



By A. Morris



THAT PEOPLE fluctuate emotionally is no new idea—even to the most of us. We all have our ups and downs and sometimes we comment upon. Psychologists are also familiar with this fact. Less well known however is the variation in our work-output caused by these emotional variations. A number of industrial psychologists have probed into the matter and have discovered that there is a definite correlation between the time of the week and the amount of work we do.

Almost invariably work-output is better toward the end of a work week, than the beginning. This is accounted for partially by mood and partially by the fact that week-ends are rather rough for the most of us. Thus, like starting a ponderous machine, a certain amount of time is required for us to roll into high gear.

It seems that a man becomes conditioned to his job. The first day or two of the week it is hard for him to get into the routine but as time rolls on, he slides smoothly into the groove and toward the end of the week, stimulated by the knowledge that shortly he'll be free, he produces more and works efficiently.

What these findings will do to the future worker, we don't know, but lets hope that it doesn't give anybody the idea of making robots of us!

KISS and KILL

Making love to Betty, he discovered, was like juggling an atom bomb: the risk is terrific but look at the fun you have!



They embraced, unaware of the danger that lurked directly behind them...



By P. F. Costello

GREGG rose soundlessly from his hiding place behind a bloated puffball and took careful aim. There were four Earthmen and two Venusians in the small clearing. The Earthmen huddled around the small campfire, not for

the warmth but for the drying effect of the heat. The two Venusians were slightly to one side, settled comfortably on woolen blankets, woolen because hair of any kind was their favorite food.

Gregg's knuckle tightened on the

trigger, then paused while his eyes darted to the two tents. Which one was Betty in? He wished he knew, but there was no way of finding out. And this opportunity might not come again.

His face became a mask of grim destruction as he squeezed the trigger and re-aimed almost before each steel-jacketed bullet left the barrel of his compact automatic.

The four Earthmen froze into various positions as they were caught by the high-speed bullets, then slowly toppled to the pithy ground. Even as they were sinking in death Gregg was pumping bullets into the Venusians and cursing monotonously as he saw the wounds close up, a frothy bubble of air forming over the spot where each bullet had entered.

"It's no use," he groaned, dropping behind the concealment of the puffball.

Swiftly, desperately, he jerked the loading clip out of the automatic and inserted another. This one was loaded with bullets designed for killing Venusians. Soft metal noses designed to flare out into jagged plates of destruction that could tear large holes in the unholy flesh of the boneless natives. Leave them so decimated that they could not pull their flesh together again.

Gun reloaded, Gregg stood up again, recklessly ignoring the possibility of the Venusians having recovered from their surprise enough to return his fire.

They were gone. The flap of the larger tent was swaying slightly, mute evidence of the way they had gone.

"If they get to Betty—" Gregg groaned, leaping forward.

He couldn't fire into the tent blind. Betty was sure to be in there. She might be hit, and though the soft bullets wouldn't kill her unless they made

a direct hit in one of her eyes, they would leave deep bruises and broken skin where they struck a human being.

He reached the tent and jerked back the flap, gun ready. His eyes darted about the gloomy interior. It was empty.

There was a gaping rent in the back of the tent and two glistening ribbons of slime leading off into the fungoid jungle, trails left by the two Venusians in their hasty flight.

Had they taken Betty with them? Gregg rushed to the other tent to make sure. She was not there.

He came out of the tent. One of the four Earthmen was trying to rise. Gregg went over to him and bent down.

"Where are they taking her?" he asked grimly, ignoring the red splotch spreading over the man's chest.

"Go to hell," the man gritted, glaring at Gregg with bloodshot eyes.

His features a grim mask, Gregg gripped the man's hair with his left hand and slowly dug the thumb of his right hand into the man's eye. The man began to scream.

"Where are they taking her?" Gregg repeated, twisting his thumb slightly and pressing more.

"God!" the man screamed. "Don't!"

Gregg let go. The man sank back, blubbing softly.

Gregg waited two seconds, then gripped the man's hair again.

"To the ravine between the two mountains north of here," the man said quickly.

"Who's there?" Gregg demanded. As the man hesitated, Gregg started to pull him up by the hair.

"The king of Venus," he said hastily.

"Who else?" Gregg demanded. "What Earthmen?"

When there was no answer Gregg

jabbed at the now bloated eye. The man screamed.

"What Earthmen?" Gregg demanded.

He stared at the man's face, etched with the agonizing pain inflicted on his eye, then let him fall back and stood up.

"Too late," Gregg muttered. "If he had only lived long enough to tell me who's behind this."

He ran into the smaller tent and out through the jagged hole in the back, bent over in a half crouch as he followed the twin trails of nearly dry, glistening slime through the forest of infinitely varied shapes and colors, the toadstool forests of Venus....

AS GREGG half ran along the trail he cursed monotonously in a bitter mixture of anger and discouragement. He was envisioning what could be happening to Betty this very moment. The Venusians with their insatiable appetite for wool and hair would be stripping her as they fled, coating her entire skin with their digestive slime that would seal her eyes closed, form bubbles over her nostrils that would pop and send the glue-like stuff into her nostrils.

He had once seen a man rescued from a Venusian. The man had tried to kill himself, sickened to the soul and retching, feeling that never again could he feel clean.

The toadstools were silent spectators of his progress, arrayed in their bright greenish yellows, leprous grays and waxy whites with immodest underthings of dark browns and blacks.

A soft-shelled snail big as a man's head paused on the sloping dome of a yellow-and green-streaked toadstool to wave its drumstick horns at him questioningly. With a snarl of rage at everything Venusian Gregg shot it, feeling a small sense of pleasure as he saw its delicate form become a

blob of scrambled egg and shell slowly seeping into the jagged wound left in the pithy dome of the toadstool, one disembodied horn waving an indignant protest at this wanton act.

With unbroken stride Gregg hurried on, maintaining a pace that would enable him to overtake the two Venusians and Betty before long.

The twin ribbons of slime, each six inches wide, went in almost a straight line with no attempt at concealment.

"They must be trying to reach something fairly close before I can catch up to them," Gregg muttered. "I'd better keep my eyes open."

Ten minutes later he found what the two Venusians had been trying to reach. Only his experience with the hidden dangers of this alien planet saved him.

The twin ribbons stretched on ahead of him, utterly innocent in their beckoning of him to follow. But at his feet the color of the pithy ground began a change. Ahead it was darker and richer in texture, the toadstools larger and fatter.

He stopped, backing slowly, realizing that he had almost ran into one of the Venusian rivers that flowed along through the soil without disturbing it, as a stain flows through a blotter.

If he had continued on another few steps he would have sunk into the saturated pulpy soil, never to escape.

He had one chance of crossing successfully. It was a method he had never dared to try before. He had read of it, thinking at the time that only a fool would try it. But now there was no choice.

He bent down and touched a finger to the trail of slime left by the Venusians. It was thin but strong. Not strong enough to support his feet, but it provided a smooth surface that would add to the possibility of success in what he was about to do.

Quickly he began searching among the toadstools of the forest around him. He found several of the species he was looking for, and finally one larger than the rest.

He seized its umbrella-like body and worked it up and down until it broke free of the stem. He caught it before it could strike the ground. Its underneath was a delicate pink, thousands of meaty veinings radiating out from the solid center scar where it had joined the stem.

Carrying it, he hurried back to where the twin trails of slime led across the hidden river, thinking with gratitude of the experience he had gained during his youth in North Dakota—experience that would make the difference now between life and death.

He backed up until the darker soil, betraying the hidden river, was twenty yards away. He began running, slowly at first, then faster and faster.

At the last possible instant he leaped, directing his line of flight expertly so that he would follow one of the slime trails, projecting himself and stretching his body with the toadstool cradled under him like a sled so that when he landed most of the force would be horizontal, carrying him forward instead of shattering the toadstool.

He felt the jar of the landing as he prayed the toadstool wouldn't break. The next instant the forest was speeding past him and he knew he had succeeded so far.

But there was still one danger. If his momentum didn't carry him to solid ground he would be marooned, unable to leave the security of the toadstool without being sucked into the mire.

Even as he conjured up this picture in his tortured thoughts his impromptu sled grated to an abrupt halt, held together for a brief instant, then split into several pieces, dropping him to

the ground.

He got up, viciously pulling the sheets of sticky slime off his hands and clothing. The ground under his feet supported him! He had crossed successfully.

THE TWIN trails of slime turned to the north now. Ahead they showed a slightly weaving pattern.

"Thank God!" Gregg breathed. "They think I can't cross, so now they're taking their time."

He broke into a run, taking his automatic from its holster to have it in readiness. The sodden thud of his running footsteps and his panting breath were the only sounds about him.

Then suddenly he saw them. The short stalks, terminating in eyes, were curved around, watching him. Their slug-like bodies were undulating madly in an endeavor to carry them faster than he could run.

Between them they were carrying Betty, now stripped of all clothing and hair, appearing to be a pink mannequin wrapped in smoky cellophane.

As Gregg put on a burst of speed the two Venusians skidded to a halt, realizing that escape was impossible.

Their bulbous-brained heads came into view, mottled brown and gray puffball growths having no features, and only the two eyestalks.

Simultaneously they released Betty who dropped to the ground and half rolled over, writhing in intense nausea, fragile transparent bubbles forming at her nostrils and breaking, giving evidence that she lived.

A sucking hole formed at the base of the bulbous dome of one of the Venusians.

"Don't shoot, Earthman," it mouthed. "We can lead you to what you are seeking."

"Get away from her," Gregg said, bringing up his gun. "Get away from her."

The two Venusians backed awkwardly, their eyestalks rigidly watching him.

Gregg advanced slowly as they retreated, until he was standing over Betty. He looked down at her, her perfectly formed body fouled by its coating of cloudy slime, hairless, writhing with intense self-loathing.

He lifted his blazing eyes to the two mute natives. Calmly, coldly, he sent a soft bullet into each, watching their middles suddenly become evilly stained blobs of discolored albumen.

A mouth formed in the throat of one of them, emitting a sucking moan. Sluglike each formed a coating of slime and backed up, trying to shed it and heal themselves.

Gregg sent shot after shot into the Venusians until they were gummy pools with the stench of hydrogen sulphide exuding from them.

Then, pity softening his expression, he bent down and began powdering Betty's writhing body with crumbled dirt to dry the slimy coating so that it could be pulled free.

Finally he had it completely cleaned off. Still shuddering, Betty sat up, trying ineffectively to conceal her nakedness, giving that up and reaching up to touch her hairless scalp. When her fingers encountered nothing but skin the full realization came that her beautiful blonde hair was gone.

She dropped her face into her arms and began to weep. Her crying was interrupted by a nauseous shudder.

"Here, Betty," Gregg growled, taking off his shirt. "Get into this."

She looked up at him, saw the soft expression on his grim features.

He dropped the shirt at her feet and turned his back.

"I—I'm dressed," her voice came weakly a few moments later.

He turned. She had rolled up the sleeves. The tails of the shirt hung

halfway to her knees.

"You look—" Gregg blurted, then stopped.

"C-cute?" Betty said in a desperate attempt to attain a casual air.

Gregg nodded. And suddenly Betty was huddled against his chest, sobbing unrestrainedly. Gregg's arms went around her clumsily, holding her close, comforting her.

"COME ON, Betty," Gregg said after a while. "You must brace up. We've got to figure some way to get out of this mess and back to civilization."

"I c-c-can't h-h-help it," Betty sniffled against his neck. "I f-feel defiled. I-I'll never b-be able to l-l-look at myself again. And I c-can't go back where p-people are b-b-bald h-head-ed."

"You've got to," Gregg said. "I've got to get you to safety, and then I'm going after—"

"I'm not," Betty said. "I'm staying here with you and h-h-helping you."

"Without a shirt to your name?" Gregg asked.

Betty disengaged herself and looked down at Gregg's shirt that barely covered her softly rounded contours. She smiled at him wanly but stubbornly.

"One," she corrected. "P-p-possession is n-nine points of the law."

"You're a game kid," Gregg said gruffly. "Turn your back and I'll add a pair of shorts to your wardrobe."

"That's better," Betty said ten minutes later. "I don't feel s-so immodest now. Do you have any idea where we're going?"

"We can't go back to our wrecked ship," Gregg said. "There's one of those Venusian rivers between us and that. I took a desperate gamble and skidded across it using a greasy-skinned

toadstool cup for a sled, but we couldn't hope to succeed at that another time. Our only hope is to try to make it to where those renegades were taking you. There must be ships there that we can steal."

They circled the rotten blobs that had such a short time before been two members of the only intelligent species on Venus, and headed toward the north where the serrated horizon dipped down in a sharp dent, the goal the dying man had mentioned to Gregg.

"What happened to those men who kidnapped me?" Betty asked.

"I shot them," Gregg said calmly. "One of them lived long enough to tell me where they had been headed."

Betty didn't answer, thinking of the other members of their own party that had been shot down in cold blood—those who hadn't been killed in the crash landing of the passenger ship on which she had been stewardess and Gregg the pilot.

"Stop that!" Gregg said sharply, and she knew that her thoughts had been showing. By an effort she became aware of things around her, gradually seeing in them the touch of a Disney-ish fantasy.

From some distance to the right of their path came a sharp explosive sound. They stopped in their tracks, Gregg holding his automatic ready, searching through the forest of toadstools for some sign of movement. Almost immediately they saw it.

It was a swirling cloud rising and expanding, perhaps two hundred yards away, the wind already beginning to break it up.

"Oh!" Gregg said in relief. "That was a puffball explosion we heard." He looked at Betty. His gaze went inevitably to her bald scalp. He turned his eyes away hastily.

"Have you got a knife?" Betty said, her voice barely audible. "I

could use one of the sleeves of this shirt to cover my head."

"That's a good idea," Gregg said. "It will protect the scalp until your hair starts growing again."

"W-will it—ever?" Betty said, close to tears.

Gregg looked at her pathetic expression, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips against his will. Suddenly he was laughing.

Betty's expression changed to outraged indignation. Then she was struggling against the contagion of his laughter. It was too great for her. She was laughing with him, nearly doubling over with mirth.

She placed her hand on his shoulder for support while she shook with gales of laughter.

And suddenly, somehow, they were in each other's arms, their lips meeting hotly in a long kiss, their hearts pounding against each other in their close embrace. At the same instant they both stopped, becoming suddenly gravely serious.

For a long moment they stared deeply into each other's eyes, their souls naked and undefended.

"What happens now?" Gregg said softly.

Betty lifted her face, her eyes veiling to half hidden pools of deep flowing surrender. Gregg's head bent. Their lips met again, tenderly, then fiercely.

Betty pulled her lips away, kissing Gregg's cheek and then his ear.

"The knife," she whispered, dreamily, her lips caressing his ear.

"Very touching," a strange voice exploded into their consciousness.

GREGG AND Betty froze against each other in startled surprise. Then Gregg reached suddenly for his automatic.

"Touch that gun and you die," the voice barked.

Gregg paused, remembering with a sinking sensation that his gun was loaded with the soft bullets that couldn't do much damage to an Earth-man.

He turned his head slowly in the direction of the voice.

The man was standing in spraddled-legged nonchalance, holding an automatic steady on them in one hand, a piece of one of the edible giant mushrooms in the other. He was fat. He wore an unpressed and almost shapeless infantry uniform. Close-cropped black hair topped a fat face and slanted eyes. There was no mistaking his light yellow, shiny skin.

"A third generation renegade!" Gregg exclaimed.

"Right," the man said. "Now step away from that girl and drop your gun—very slowly, touching it only with the tips of your fingers."

"Third generation?" Betty echoed. "Why, he looks like an oriental—a Mongolian."

"No no," Gregg said, not taking his eyes from the man. "His great grandparents were as white as you and I."

"That's right," the man said. "But me—because Venus does something to the human strain—I'm kicked out. Me and a lot of others."

Gregg had stepped away from Betty, moving slowly and carefully. At the same time he was reaching down for his holstered gun with his fingertips. "We're fat and yellow," the man went on, his eyes watching Gregg's movements warily. "We can't have white girls unless we find them." He flicked his eyes toward Betty for the barest fraction of a second.

In that instant Gregg jerked out his gun and fired. The fat man fired an instant later, but Gregg's soft-nosed bullet had caught him on the chest, flattening out and making a painful bruise, spoiling his aim.

Gregg pressed the trigger again as he felt the whine of the bullet passing near his ear. Again and again.

Each of his soft bullets struck, inflicting pain and bruises like the tip of a cracking whip. But the fat man now realized that Gregg's gun was loaded with soft bullets. He was steeling himself against the pain and attempting to aim.

In another moment he would fire. Gregg leaped toward him with reckless abandon.

The fat man fired three shots wildly, then turned and fled before Gregg could reach him.

Gregg sent several shots after him, one catching him between the shoulder blades and staggering him momentarily. Then he was lost to view behind a giant toadstool.

Quickly Gregg changed clips, firing the soft bullet still in the firing chamber so that a steel-jacketed man-killing one was ready for firing.

"I've got to get him, Betty," he said grimly. "If I don't he'll stalk us and wait until he can knock me off."

"Wasn't he terrible looking?" Betty said shuddering. "He looked like—a toadstool, with his shiny yellow skin. But what's this about third generation? I'd never heard of it."

"It isn't generally known," Gregg said. "They try to keep it secret. But you know of the law that says no human beings can stay on Venus more than ten years, and then only so long as they stay single. If you get married you have to go back to the Earth at once."

"Yes," Betty said.

"This is what made them pass that law," Gregg said. "For some unaccountable reason the human race changes when it reproduces on Venus. There's still a few hundred of these third generation unfortunates roaming around in the toadstool forests. When-

ever they're caught they're shipped back to the Earth and placed in an experimental colony on one of the south Pacific islands. They're encouraging them to live normally there, and waiting to see if they revert to the normal strain again."

"Maybe we could capture him and turn him over to the authorities," Betty suggested.

"Not a chance," Gregg answered dryly. "We're going to be lucky to get back ourselves. I wonder where he got that gun? And that uniform? It looked hand sewn. I wonder..."

"What?" Betty asked.

"The wreck of our plane," Gregg said. "There's been too many plane wrecks in the last twelve months, and they've all been in this general area. And when rescue crews got to the wrecks they found them stripped. The third generation humans might organize by themselves, but they couldn't sneak into our cities and sabotage the planes. That would take white men."

"But why would white men do that?" Betty asked.

Gregg thought he saw a movement in the direction the fat man had gone, and fired hastily. The shot echoed hollowly back from the toadstool forest.

"I don't know," he said. "Unless—maybe they plan on using these third generation humans, capitalizing on them to set up an empire of their own and get a monopoly on the mold drug industry."

He took Betty's hand and took up their journey toward the distant cut in the mountain range.

"It looks like we may have uncovered something—if we live to report it," he said.

"DO YOU think he's still following us?" Betty asked a half hour later.

"I don't know," Gregg said. "Probably not. He's probably feeling pretty sore all over from those soft slugs."

"Then I'd like to borrow your knife," Betty said.

"Oh, yes," Gregg said, stopping. "Here, let's get behind that big toadstool over there first so we aren't so exposed."

He helped her cut off the sleeve and split it so she could wear it as a shawl.

"You look cuter every minute," he said, inspecting the results. "If we get out of this alive—"

"Maybe we won't, Gregg," she said. "You know, I—I never thought it would be like this—I mean—I always thought it would be just ordinary. Falling in love with someone at a dance, getting proposed to in the moonlight—setting a date for the marriage and sending out announcements. Now I—I don't seem to care so much about that."

Gregg took a step toward her.

"Uh-uh," he said, stopping. He laughed shakily. "Remember what happened last time? We won't get out alive unless we—"

Her fixed expression arrested his words. He abandoned caution, crushing her against him. Their lips met hungrily, fiercely.

"Oh, Gregg," Betty whispered, her breath hot against his cheek. "I love you, love you, love you."

"Soon it will be my turn," the voice of the fat man sounded, calmly.

But even as he spoke Gregg had lifted Betty off the ground in one arm and swung around, firing.

The fat man had been standing spraddle-legged as before, a broad smile on his fat lips. He remained that way when the small black hole appeared in the center of his chest.

His hand holding the automatic slowly dropped, and the black fire in

his eyes changed to a bright glaze. Almost ludicrously he toppled backwards, the automatic spilling out of his fingers.

"Got him!" Gregg said softly.

He went forward warily, gun ready, and bent over the fat man.

"Is he dead?" Betty asked weakly.

"Yes," Gregg said. "He's out of our hair now. That's one relief. But I—I almost feel sorry for him."

Betty came up beside him. Together they stared down at the fat face with its lips still smiling in death.

"It's almost impossible to believe his ancestors were white people," Betty said.

"They were, though," Gregg said. "It's just one of those unexplainable things. There are lots of instances known where one species of life became something different in a different locality. Back in 1950 when Israel was being founded, there was one section where people who had been dark-haired and dark-eyed for as long as they could remember, changed to blond haired blue eyed people in the first generation on the new soil. In West Virginia there's a strip of land where a certain variety of tobacco plant changes when grown there. No one knows what causes it. Not a chemical, because it doesn't grow like that in the same soil when that soil is taken somewhere else. A radiation maybe. Maybe it's some radiation on Venus that does *this* to the human race."

He turned away from the dead man, taking Betty's hand and leading her with him. They had gone only a dozen steps when a droning sound became audible. Over the tops of the toadstools a helicopter came into view.

Betty leaped into the air excitedly, waving her arm. Gregg seized her roughly and dragged her to the ground.

"Quick," he said. "Let's get under

that toadstool over there."

"But why?" Betty asked, bewildered. "That's a civilized plane—" Her eyes widened as she recalled what Gregg had said about white men being behind the mystery of the fat man and his uniform.

She crawled under the low hanging canopy of the toadstool and huddled beside Gregg. Above them the dark latticework of the underdome of the toadstool looked like rafters in a miniature, other-world house.

Together they watched the helicopter come to a landing near the corpse of the fat man. Even as the wheels were touching the ground a door in its side opened, and three men leaped out, running in three different directions to concealment behind the thick-trunked toadstools.

"I got a glimpse of the face of the one that went to the right," Betty whispered. "He's a yellow-skin. You were right, Gregg. I'm sorry."

"Let's be very quiet," Gregg whispered back. "Maybe they won't find us, or maybe I can figure out something."

"I'LL TAKE the copter up where I can see them if they come out of where they're hiding," a voice from the interior of the plane said loudly. A moment later the motor roared, lifting the helicopter into the air.

"I'm going to take a chance," Gregg said. "I'm sure of where one of those yellow-skins are."

He slid to the edge of their circle of concealment under the dome of the toadstool and took careful aim four feet up the thick stalk of the toadstool twenty feet away. He fired and pulled back into the shadow quickly.

There was a scream that rattled into silence. A limp figure fell into view, lying still.

"That's one of them," Gregg whispered. "I only hope the other two

figure I may know where they are, and move so I can locate them."

There were several minutes of silence during which the only sound was the loud drone of the helicopter overhead somewhere, muffled by the natural soundproofing of the toadstool. Then a voice called loudly.

"Say, mister," it said. "You must have us wrong. We aren't here to do you harm. We're your friends. You shouldn't shoot us. What do you say? Friends? Huh?"

"Thank God," Betty breathed. "Let's get out from under this thing. I keep thinking it'll fold in on us and digest us."

Gregg clamped a hand over her mouth and held her still.

"Quiet," he said.

Her eyes became so large and round in her bewilderment that Gregg grinning, took his hand away and kissed her.

"Haven't you ever read anything about World War II?" he asked. "All they want us to do is show ourselves and we'll be shot—or worse."

"But maybe he's telling the truth," Betty whispered. "Are you going to shoot everyone who comes along, Gregg?"

The grin twisted into a mask of bitterness.

"Yesterday I had never killed anyone in my life," he said softly. "But now—every time I pull the trigger I think of all those people in the plane, dead. I think of you captured by those men back there and those two Venusians, of you covered with—" He didn't complete the thought, but turned away, crouching down to look out once more.

He caught his breath sharply and motioned to Betty to keep silent. In plain view, less than six feet away, were a pair of legs.

With infinite care Gregg brought up his automatic, aiming it through the

wall of the toadstool at a point above the legs. But he didn't pull the trigger. He waited.

"Hey, transport pilot," the voice sounded loudly outside. At the same time the feet pivoted, indicating that their owner was turning, looking in various directions. "See? I'm out in the open. I have no gun. I'm your friend. Come on out, pal."

The feet moved away.

"I'm going to try something," Gregg whispered to Betty. "The toadstools echo and disguise the direction of a voice if it's any distance."

He went to the edge of their cover at a direction at right angles to where he knew the man outside to be. Cupping his hands on his mouth he called:

"If you're friends have the helicopter land and all of you come out in plain view and drop your guns."

"Where are you?" the man answered. There was a brief pause, then, "All right, we'll do that."

Gregg chuckled. "I was hoping he would do it," he whispered to Betty.

"See!" Betty said. "You were wrong about these men in the helicopter."

The droning noise had changed. Betty and Gregg peeked out. It was landing at the same spot where it had landed before.

"You stay right here," Gregg ordered sternly. "No matter what happens don't come out. Not even if I tell you to. I'll come here and get you when everything's O.K.. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Gregg," Betty said meekly.

They continued watching the helicopter. The two surviving yellow men had opened the door of the machine.

"Remember what I said now," Gregg admonished. He gave Betty a brief kiss and crept out from under the toadstool on the side opposite the helicopter.

QUICKLY HE ran away from the toadstool until it was out of sight. He changed directions, going in a wide circle and creeping warily toward the helicopter from another direction.

There were now three men standing beside it. One, the pilot of the machine, was white, and dressed in a business suit. All of them had their hands in the air.

Gregg studied the two yellow-skinned men. Neither was fat, but both had on the same type of uniforms that the fat yellow man had worn.

Gregg tried to see inside the copter. He could see part of the interior, but no one else was visible. He frowned, hesitating.

Nodding briefly to himself he barked, "Walk well away from the plane, but keep together."

Without hesitation the three walked forward, stopping when they had gone about thirty feet.

Gregg's frown deepened.

The lift blades of the copter were idling slowly. The plane seemed unoccupied. But this had to be a trap. He felt sure of that. He had counted on them thinking of some way to trap him. That was the only way they would have done as he suggested.

One thing had been obvious from the very start, he reflected. These men would never let him get back to civilization where he could report their location. Their sole aim was to kill him. They had other ideas about Betty.

He studied the three men, still standing with their hands held high in the air. They were, of course, counting on his not being able to shoot them down in cold blood. Or were they?

Gregg's eyes went back to the copter worriedly. Was there someone lurking inside, waiting for him to reveal himself, so that whoever was hid-

ing in there could shoot him?

He studied the three standing with their hands up. He could shoot one of them maybe and change position fast enough so that no one could get him. But all three?

A plan suggested itself. He could go to the plane and get in it, take it into the air, and make these three start marching. When they had gone far enough he could come back and get Betty, and they could make it back to civilization in the helicopter.

But maybe that was what they wanted him to do. Maybe their scheme for trapping him was dependent on that.

There *had* to be someone else in the plane. Nothing else made sense. Someone well concealed, with his gun trained on the doorway, or perhaps from some vantage point inside the plane where he could get in a shot the moment he stepped into view.

That meant, Gregg concluded, that if he shot the three, whoever was in the plane would take off immediately and hover in the air, ready to drop on him if he moved.

Gregg studied the copter. Where would a man lurk inside it? It was a familiar type of craft. He had flown them himself more than once, just to broaden his experience as a pilot. It was a ten-passenger machine. There were several places a man could conceal himself. A dozen shots could be fired into the body of the plane without knowing if anyone lurking there had been hit.

It might be possible to cripple the ship with a shot, but it offered an immediate means of escape from the toadstool forest wilderness. It was the bait.

The three men with their hands high in the air had their backs to the ship. He could sneak to the ship without them seeing him. That, more than anything else, spoke of their being someone left in the plane. The bait

was dangled, apparently not connected with any sort of trap. It was too simple. Too innocent appearing.

Suddenly Gregg made up his mind what to do. He checked every point. It wasn't fool proof, but it might work. At least it would leave him and Betty no worse off than they were before.

TAKING CAREFUL aim he shot down the three men with cold lack of emotion. It took little more than a second. Without trying to hide he turned to the plane.

"All right, you in there," he called loudly. "Throw your gun out and come out with your hands up. If you try to take the plane up I'll cripple it."

There was a flicker of movement inside the plane. Gregg threw himself to one side. A shot sounded. Something hot touched Gregg's left arm at the shoulder.

He landed flat on the ground and rolled over several times before stopping. When he stopped he was in prone position, his eyes on the plane, automatic ready for instant use. There was a grim smile on his lips. He had figured right. It had been a trap. But now there was only one against him!

He risked a quick glance at his arm. A furrow had been ploughed in the skin. It wasn't bleeding much. A nervous grin flicked across his face. His eyes darted back to the helicopter with its idling blades and deceptively calm cabin, its invitingly open doorway.

A hand came into view holding a gun. There was a shot. The hand vanished. The bullet had gone wild. Gregg quickly aimed and fired through the cabin at the spot where the hidden man would be. A second later came an agonized cry.

Gregg waited. There was no movement from the plane. Had he killed

or wounded the man? Or was this a scheme of the man to lure him toward the plane? Gregg's nervous grin flicked again, briefly, as he envisioned the man waiting for him to stick his head in the doorway and get it blown off.

Five minutes went by. Ten minutes. Suddenly the motor in the plane speeded up. Gregg caught the quick movement of the man inside as he darted back into concealment in the body of the cabin. The blades weren't running fast enough to lift the plane off the ground.

"Nice try," Gregg muttered. Then a vision of the control panel of the copter rose in his memory. From what he recalled of this type of helicopter it would have been far quicker to rev up for takeoff than to increase the lift motor speed by a lesser amount.

"I wonder if he could have had some reason for doing that?" Gregg muttered.

He risked glancing up into the sky. Three black dots were moving along just under the cloud layer.

"So that's it!" Gregg muttered. "He wanted to drown out the noise they make. He's been in radio contact with them." He couldn't make out much about the planes. From their slow speed, however, he knew they must be helicopters.

He glanced back at the plane on the ground and decided to take a long chance. In rapid succession he fired the rest of the clip into the cabin of the plane, spacing the shots under each of the viewports.

Jerking out the clip and dropping it, he put in a second one and jumped to his feet, running toward the plane.

He counted on the man inside either being hit or not daring to move, waiting for more shots.

Instead of heading for the open door of the plane, Gregg dived under it.

"Now," he smiled to himself, "you'll have to stick your head out to get a shot at me."

He placed an ear against the belly of the cabin. Then he shook his head. The motor sound drowned out any noise from inside the cabin.

He hesitated only a moment. There wasn't much time. He decided he would have to risk it. He crept to a point just under the open door way.

In a quick movement he rose and looked in, ducking his head back down again. Then he stood up once more. What he had seen convinced him. The body of a man was stretched out full length in the aisle between the seats, a black hole just in front of the right ear, blood still seeping slowly from it.

"No chance of his playing possum with that," he grunted. He turned in the direction of the toadstool under which Betty was hidden. "Betty!" he called. Then, "Nuts!"

He looked up at the approaching helicopters, plainly visible now. "It'll be nip and tuck," he muttered as he ran to get Betty.

A minute later he lifted her into the cabin of the plane and followed, slamming the door.

"No time to dump out the corpse," he said. "We're going to have to run for it—and we'd better be lucky."

AS HE SLID into the pilot's seat and jerked down on the gas level, feeling the sudden increase in weight as the helicopter rose from the ground, he saw the three copters swooping down.

Gregg didn't rise to meet them. He waited until he was able to clear the tops of the tallest toadstools and sent the copter in dizzy flight sideways that took it a hundred yards in half as many seconds.

With hastily remembered skill he manipulated the controls so that at the end of the swoop the cabin had

swiveled about so that he was facing the three pursuing copters.

"See if there's anything resembling a machine rifle in here, Betty," he said over his shoulder.

Even as he said it he worked the controls, sending the copter zooming upward and to one side to avoid the foremost copter coming at him.

"H-how can I?" Betty complained, picking herself up off the seat she had been thrown into.

"Sorry, honey," Gregg said.

He caught a glimpse of a fat, bright yellow face through the plastiglass covering the pilot section of the copter he had just evaded. Then he went over it.

Swiftly he pivoted the cabin. The three copters were going to do what he had feared. Separate and come in from three different angles so that he couldn't keep them all three in view at once.

"Well, there's an answer to that," he muttered.

He set the copter in full flight along the tops of the round domes of the toadstool forest, touching the control of the tail propeller until the cabin was slightly sidewise.

With one eye forward he watched the approaching copters. One was driving directly for him, the other two well to either side.

He waited until the one driving toward him was less than a thousand feet behind him, skimming over the tops of the toadstools. Abruptly he lifted the plane and reversed its balance.

The movement caught the other pilot unprepared. One instant he was in hot pursuit, the next he was trying to avoid the suicidal plunge of the ship directly at him from above.

Instinct took the place of judgment, for a split second. The next instant it was too late to correct his blunder. The undercarriage drove into the

pulpy mass of a toadstool, tipping the copter over.

Gregg saw it land upside down, the lift blades biting into the soil, the cabin taking up the spin and swirling wildly for several revolutions.

But now the other two were coming in, and that trick would hardly work a second time.

Gregg went up in a vertical climb. He smiled as he saw the pursuers receding below.

"Maybe this is the answer," he said to Betty. "We have a lighter load. Maybe our ceiling will be enough above theirs so that they can't reach us, once we get up there."

"Maybe we could lose them in the cloud layer," Betty said.

"Not a chance," Gregg said. "All aircraft on Venus are equipped with a very compact radar that can see in the cloud layer like it wasn't there." He pointed to a small screen in the center of the instrument panel and a toggle switch beside it. "But if we can stay above them," he went on, "we might be able to make it to the nearest airport base."

The other three planes were a thousand feet below when Gregg and Betty saw the lift blades bite into the first misty tendrils of the cloud layer and send them downward onto and around the outside of the plastiglass cowl of the forecabin. Seconds later they were lost in a spaceless void of luminous gray fog.

Gregg turned on the cabin lights and switched on the radar. Betty watched the screen with interest.

"That's the first time I ever saw one of them working," she said.

"Those three dots in the screen are those ships below," Gregg said. "If they were ahead of us they'd be red instead of black. It's a combination of color TV and radar that shows four composite directional views, each in its own color."

Betty looked outside. "We seem to be stationary," she said. "Are we still going up?"

"There's the altimeter," Gregg said, pointing. "That red mark on the dial is the ceiling for the plane. We're almost up to it now. I'm hoping that needle will go past the red mark. It should since we don't have ten people on board."

They watched the needle climb until it was indicating an altitude five hundred feet above ceiling. It stopped there. They watched the three black dots in the radar screen as they grew larger. Finally they grew no larger. They had reached their ceilings and were still a few hundred feet below.

"Hooray!" Betty said happily.

"How about a kiss to celebrate, honey?" Gregg asked. He slid out of the pilot seat and caught her in his arms.

"You didn't give me a chance to say yes or no," Betty gasped, "but the answer is—"

"Put up your hands," a strangely sucking voice sounded near them.

"GOD!" GREGG said explosively. Slowly he took his arms from around Betty and raised them. "I'm beginning to think kissing you causes these things to happen, Betty," he murmured.

With their hands elevated they turned in the direction the voice had come from. In the small doorway leading to the tail luggage compartment was one of the native Venusians, an automatic held ready, several small appendages wrapped around its stock and the trigger.

A wound-like orifice opened in the throat and worked suckingly, emitting words.

Gregg didn't pay attention to the words. Betty was suddenly shuddering. She moaned faintly, her eyes rolling back, and started to fall.

"Don't shoot!" Gregg said sharply, catching her and lowering her into a seat. "She fainted."

"I won't shoot," the suckingly slurred voice of the Venusian snail-like creature said, "unless you reach for your gun."

Gregg made sure Betty was safe and stood up. One of the eyes of the Venusian was fixed warily on him. The other eyestalk was studying the dead man stretched out in the aisle.

"Sometimes I don't quite understand you Earth creatures," the Venusian said from his throat orifice. Both eyestalks focused on Gregg. "Take your gun out of its holster with two fingers and drop it, then kick it toward me."

Gregg hesitated. He saw the tendrils wrapped in the trigger of the Venusian's gun tighten.

"I guess there's nothing else to do," he said grimly.

Very slowly he did as he had been ordered.

The Venusian glided forward until he had passed over the dead man and was resting on Gregg's gun. The trail of slime he left was evidence of how useless the gun would be now.

"Slide into a seat," the Venusian ordered. "Then lean over the back of the seat in front until you are hanging slack by your middle. I'm going to pass you and I don't want you in a position to start anything."

Gregg did as he was told. He had heard stories of how fast Venusians could react if they wished. Hooked over the back of the seat, he realized it was a very effective way of preventing him from moving suddenly. Long before he could get into a position for attack the eyestalks of the Venusian would see his movements and enable their owner to shoot him.

He watched the snail-like advance of the Venusian who glided forward and slowly turned around.

"Now pick up your female and go into the luggage room with her," the Venusian ordered.

Gregg picked up Betty and went to the rear door. The compartment was small. He set Betty down and went inside, then pulled her in beside him.

"Close the door," the Venusian ordered.

With a sinking feeling of defeat, Gregg complied. Shortly after he heard the click of the lock. He was locked in, without a gun, in total darkness.

A low moan came from Betty's lips.

"Take it easy, darling," Gregg soothed. "You're all right. He isn't going to touch you."

"Where am I?" Betty said. "It's so dark."

"He locked us in the luggage compartment," Gregg said. "I—I guess he's going to take us to their hideout and turn us over to the yellow-skins."

There was a sudden sickening lurch of the helicopter, to one side. It began a series of swoops in different directions.

"If he can get this crate there without a crackup," Gregg amended.

He felt Betty's hands touch him exploratively. He took them in his and sank down beside her on the floor of the compartment.

"That Venusian snail's a worse driver than I was the first time I took a copter up," Gregg groaned. "I'll be sick before long."

"I haven't anything in me to be sick with," Betty said weakly. "Will you kiss me again once more—before I die Gregg?"

"Why not?" Gregg said recklessly. "What could happen in here?"

He bent toward her in the darkness, his lips finding her cheek and planting caresses on it as they searched for her lips. She sighed in ecstasy as their lips met. His arms crept about her

waist, pulling her close to him. He felt her arms twine about his neck, her breasts press against him.

At that instant there was a crash. The compartment tilted to a forty-five degree angle. A searing pain shot through Gregg's wounded shoulder as it struck the wall.

"My leg!" Betty screamed. "My leg! It's broken!" A long minute later she said, "Maybe it isn't. Get off of it you—you baboon." Then she was laughing and crying at the same time. "I'm convinced now," she said. "I'm a jinx or you're a jinx or we're a jinx to each other. Every time you kiss me something awful happens. I'm swearing off."

THEY SAT huddled together. The Venusian seemed to have gotten the hang of the controls. There were no more wild lurches. The helicopter was travelling smoothly.

"I guess it won't be long now," Gregg said after a long silence. "They've got us and there's nothing we can do. You know, I smelled a trap when they marched away from their plane to show me they meant no harm. I was right, but I didn't think of looking in the luggage compartment to make sure there were no more of them. What a fool I was. And after all we went through!"

"It wasn't your fault," Betty said, pulling his head toward her and planting a cautious kiss on his cheek. "And while there's life there's hope."

"Sure," Gregg said gruffly. "Sure, that's right. While there's life there's hope. But while—I have the chance, Betty, I want to tell you—I love you. I want you to be my wife—and I'll die trying to make that possible."

"I love you, Gregg," Betty said simply. "Even if I die—no matter what happens—that will make my life beautiful. I hope—too—that we get out of this some way, so that we can

get married and settle down on Earth—you with a transport job, me raising a crop of—of little pilots and stewardesses."

"Funny," Gregg said slowly. "We've been on the same run several times and we never gave each other a tumble. It took this to get us together—when maybe it's—"

"Don't even say it!" Betty warned. "It's never too late. I—" She took a deep breath. "To heck with the jinx," she said bravely. "I want a kiss."

"I'm a sucker for doing this," Gregg said.

He took her chin between his fingers and lifted her face. Their lips met fearfully. When nothing happened they wrapped their arms about each other, prolonging the kiss hungrily, lovingly, and then passionately....

A lurching crash shook them violently. They were thrown against the wall of the compartment. It became the floor, and then the wall again as they rolled onto the inverted ceiling. A giant hand picked them up and threw them against another wall, pinning them for a moment, then dropping them.

Dazed, they slowly sat up. There was a dead silence. The motors were shut off.

Footsteps sounded beyond the door, almost too loud in the silence. Muffled voices. A moment later the key rattled in the lock of the door. A crack of light appeared, blinding Gregg and Betty.

"Come out of there," an Earthman's voice barked. "One false move and you'll be shot."

Blinking his eyes in the unaccustomed light Gregg picked Betty up, setting her on her feet.

"We're coming out," he said.

Keeping his arm protectively around her he went through the door.

He blinked his eyes at the blinding light, then blinked them again

at what he saw. It was an Earthman in the uniform of the Planet Police!

Gregg jerked his eyes past the man, out through the door in the shell to the conventional airport buildings. The United Planets flag flew lazily in the breeze over one of them.

"You're the police?" Gregg said, jerking back to the man. "Thank God! We're safe, Betty!"

IT WAS AN hour before things were straightened out to everyone's satisfaction. Dazedly Gregg and Betty learned that the Venusian native was a member of the native police who had been on the track of the gang who had been sabotaging commercial planes. He had located their secret base and joined them. It would have taken him months to make the journey back overland. He had stolen aboard the helicopter and waited for a chance to take it over, bringing in some captives to present as evidence. He had been as surprised at learning they weren't part of the gang as Gregg and Betty were to learn he wasn't.

In his slow sucking speech he had described how he had dropped into the lift vanes of one of the two remaining helicopters with the undercarriage, and as a consequence when he himself landed the plane had tipped over.

Police pursuit planes were quickly on their way to capture the hiding place of the band of third-generation yellow-skin humans and renegade whites.

Gregg and Betty were alone in the office of the post captain, waiting for transportation back to their home base. The captain had gone out someplace to get some clothing for Betty.

They stood uneasily in the center of the room for a while. Finally Gregg took Betty's hand. They went over to the windows overlooking the

field from which fighter planes were still taking off.

There was another long silence. It was Betty who broke it.

"Gregg," she said hesitantly. "M-maybe we'd better not get married after all."

"Why not?" Gregg said, startled and half indignant. "What is this?"

"I'm just convinced that, no matter where we are, when we kiss each other something'll happen," she said, avoiding his eyes and looking out at the field, a smile tugging faintly at the corners of her mouth. "We can't go through life having a major calamity every—every ten minutes." She turned to face him, defiantly. "Can we?"

Gregg stared at her, stupefied.

"The heck we can't!" he said. "And we're going to start right now!"

Betty made an attempt to evade him. He caught her in his arms. She turned her face away. He persisted doggedly until his lips caught hers, holding them. She struggled briefly, then returned his kiss, her arms going around his neck.

Slowly their lips parted. They drew back, wonderingly, staring into each other's eyes in delight.

"Well what d'you know!" Betty cooed. "Nothing, but absolutely nothing, happened!" She lifted her face for another kiss....

...She opened her eyes, a splitting headache pounding at her skull. She was lying in a stretcher. Gregg was bending over her, his shoulder and head bandaged, an anxious concern on his dirt-streaked face.

"What—" Betty said. Her lips soundlessly completed the question. "—happened?"

"One of the fighter planes went out of control as it took off from the field and crashed into the building where we were," Gregg said. He flushed guiltily, looking away.

Betty tugged at his arm. He looked back at her. She held up her arms toward him, a brave smile on her lips.

"Let's try it just—once—more, my darling," she said pathetically. "Are you game?"

Gregg looked around. They were well away from the burning building. There were no planes in the sky nor

on the airstrip. There was nothing moving within fifty feet.

He looked at Betty then, a fierce hungry light in his eyes. He leaned forward, taking one last hasty glance around, then hunched his shoulders.

"I'll always be game, darling," he said.

THE END

THE CAMERA EYE

★ By Jon Barry ★

THAT THE eye, particularly the human eye, behaves much like a camera is a well known fact. You have lenses, a focusing arrangement and a film (the retina) with which to take your picture. It is not generally appreciated however that the comparison between the mechanical camera and the eye is really astounding.

A German physiologist named Kiihne, did some remarkable work back in the nineteenth century. His experiment with a rabbit's eye was extremely fruitful. He held a rabbit in such a position so that it was forced to look at a barred window in its cage. Then he killed it and removed the eye and retina. With suitable photographic equipment, he made a photograph of the image retained on the retina, an image which of course turned out to be a picture of the barred window!

The same experiment was later tried by him, with a condemned criminal. The resultant image, unlike the rabbit's could not easily be determined; nevertheless, it was a recognizable image of something, perhaps, a book, perhaps, the outline of a building. Regardless, it showed the astounding similarity of retinal images to camera plates.

In connection with work on the human eye, a number of reports have followed the experiments of a young student who is deliberately wearing a special set of reversing lenses at all times. This means that everything he sees, is upside down. But he is training himself to use them, so that eventually his brain automatically compensates for the upside down images and eventually after some training he will be able to operate in a completely normal fashion.

This has happened a number of times in the past, accidentally. An injury to the brain or eye has caused the victim to see everything in reverse. After the initial shock, adjustment was invariably made. The human mind-optical system is a wonderful thing indeed!

THE SLEEP-MAKER

★ By L. A. Burt ★

THE GRADUAL unfolding of the mysteries of the mind is not coming so much from the study of calculating machine etc., but rather from the old-fashioned, pains-taking, tedious work of the anatomical labs. Medical researchers are drawing an ever more complete picture of the human mental mechanism. The latest bit of magic uncovered is that each of us possesses a "sleep valve".

For a long time scientists have been trying to find out exactly what portion of the mind controls the business of waking and sleeping. Now they've isolated it, not in the brain directly but connected to it and joining it. It consists of a bundle of nervous tissue about the size of a test tube located at the end of the spinal column and connecting with the two halves of the brain. This little mass of nervous matter is the controlling agent. It tells you whether you're as sharp as a needle or as dopy as a penguin.

It is susceptible to the effects of drugs and stimulants and when an overdose of benzedrine or one of the barbiturates hits it, it reacts accordingly. It can be stimulated electrically also. Doctors have taken animals, to all intents and purposes completely knocked out from fatigue and drugs and by applying the right electric potentials, have kicked these animals into a parody of normal waking behavior! A direct flow of electrical current can be detected in this region also.

This new knowledge also explains why a blow at the back of the neck, a rabbit punch, is so powerful and effective in knocking out a human. Such a blow strikes right at the most vulnerable nerve bundle in the human make-up.

When more is learned of this region we can expect to find that the development of non-irritating drugs and stimulants will be accelerated. As military men found out in the last war, this knowledge is very useful. It can mean the difference between victory and defeat.

GYRO-BUS



By Milton Matthew



SOMETIMES there is something new under the sun! From Switzerland comes word of the practical use of an ingenious principle for driving public vehicles like buses and street-cars and which may have important repercussions in countries and places which are long on electrical power but short on convenient portable fuels like gasoline and gas.

The system works something like this: it's been known for a long time that nothing can beat an electric motor and there would be no gasoline engines if there was only some way to store electricity. Well, reasoned the practical Swiss designer, if you can't store electricity why not store the energy you get from it in some other way. And the way to store it is in a flywheel!

When you spin a big heavy wheel—everybody is familiar with this—you know that you can put a tremendous amount of energy in it. Just try and stop it—that tells the story. So the inventor has built a bus with a huge ton and half flywheel in-

side it and connected through a clutch to the drive shaft. At stations spaced apart every four miles or so, an electric connection is made to the motor connected to the flywheel and in a minute or two it's set spinning like mad. Enough energy is stored in the rotating disc to last the bus for about four miles. When the rotor has given up most of its energy it's set spinning at the next station. This keeps on indefinitely. It's cheap, fast and clean. The only drawback is the necessity for stopping so often to recharge the spinning wheel.

Actually a ton and a half flywheel is comparatively small so it doesn't take up much space and makes a quite practical arrangement. We don't expect to see this gadget put into power-rich America but there are plenty of places which have lots of hydro-electric power and no gas. For such places this may be the answer to the transportation problem. For it could readily be applied to automobiles. Can you picture stopping at a gas station and asking for fifty kilowatt-hours?

OVERSTUFFED UNIVERSE!



By William Karney



SINCE Einstein's Relativity, there have been almost as many pictures drawn of the universe as there are physicists and astronomers. To say that the situation was "fluid" would be no exaggeration at all.

Before modern astrophysics and Dr. Einstein, the general conception of space and time—the universe—and matter, was that all three were infinite, unlimited and unbounded. Then Relativity claimed that actually the universe was curved upon itself, unbounded but finite, its volume determined by the amount of matter present. This impression is of course hard to understand, being based upon abstruse profound mathematical calculations.

There have been variations of this picture of course, and no one can prove or disprove their validity. These theories of the universe must remain just that—theories.

Recently a famous Mexican astrophysicist has announced a new picture of the universe, based upon a different interpretation of Relativity and Birkhoffian gravitation. It claims almost the opposite of what was previously a standard. It says that the amount of matter in the universe is infinite but that it exists in a definitely limited volume! Try to imagine that one. It is like thinking of a sausage into

which an indefinite amount of meat may be crammed! An additional phrase which accompanies the announcement of this theory points out that the new universe is perfectly symmetrical in what is known as "flat space-time!"

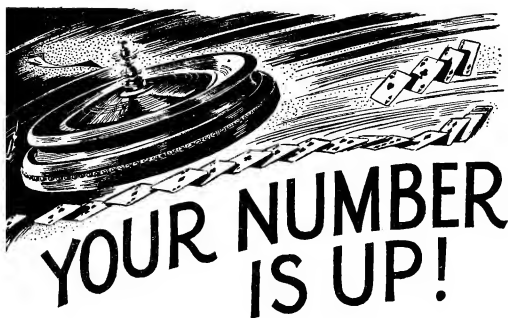
Naturally it is impossible to try and imagine a physical picture of what the astrophysicists are speaking about when they talk of these things. We go on perfectly content imagining in our minds, vague nebulous pictures of endless reaches of space, and vast amounts of matter. The mathematical justifications for thinking in terms of limitations are beyond most of us without specialized study, and we're not at all sure that even the proposers of the theory have really—in terms of visual images—any clearer picture.

It's interesting to talk of "flat space-time" and "infinite, but unbounded" universes, but to try and get visual effects from them—uh-uh...

These remarks are not to be construed that the scientists are talking gibberish. On the contrary, what they discover by such theorizing often involves radical re-orientation of thought about ordinary conventional things. Just remember what a kick in the thinking pants, Relativity gave to the popular and the scientific worlds!



He held his head in sudden agony as the mental pictures whirled insanely about him...



YOUR NUMBER IS UP!

By John W. Jakes

When he was told that death was only weeks away, Walter Ford found what he had always wanted: a reason to go on living!

THE CAB swung around a long curve.

Walter Ford slumped against the window, trying to shake the pain from his head. But it persisted horribly, a biting in the front of his skull that was like a sword sloughing through cheese with a million tiny sharp edges.

He shut his eyes. The unuttered thought symbols forming in his head were fuzzy and indistinct.

After a moment he opened his eyes again. The dark watery jungles swirled past below the aerial highway, lost in a dim world of never-lifting fog. He sat staring at the jungles as

the ground cab whirled through the traffic heading toward Cloud City. He formed no more thoughts.

He had to keep his mind a blank. Relax, and perhaps the pain would go away. The pain had to go away! His whole existence depended on the absence of mental turmoil. His brain must be sharp and clear!

His eyes swung up to the small building and focused without thought on the huge beacon searchlights as the cab drew nearer.

The light ripped through his skull with shocking suddenness, tearing away the carefully-built barrier of calm. Thoughts came cascading back,

and they were still shadowy and imprecise. The pain came back, too.

Ford felt his stomach flutter and jump. He could not escape the pain that had been within his head since he arose that morning. All day at his apartment he had fought it, with mineral baths in the gold-inlaid lavatory, and blasts of vaporized phenobarbital from his expensive air-cooling system. But it was no use.

He lifted one arm, brushing back the green cloak of Callistan dream silk. His watch showed five minutes before eleven in the evening. Ahead in the fog rose the towers of Cloud City. The minutes slipped by with fearful regularity.

And he did not know what to do.

He allowed a faint groan to come from his lips.

The driver turned from his control stick, High Martian face peering in blue puzzlement. "Is something wrong, Earth sir?"

"No," Ford said weakly, drawing his cloak tightly about him. "No, nothing's wrong. Keep going."

"Is the Earth sir ill?" the driver persisted.

Working for extra credits, damn him, Ford thought angrily. *Fawning like all the Martians. Why can't they ever stop acting like groveling dogs? Why can't they stand up beside Earthmen and act like they have faith in themselves?*

Even these mental images were distant, and they went whirling away over the gray prairies of his mind like dust-ghosts driven before a wind.

Having received no answer from Ford, the Martian concentrated a moment on slipping the cab into an adjacent lane, and then questioned, "Shall I drive the Earth sir to a Health Center?"

"Listen," Ford said, shivering when he realized that his voice was a rough croaking, "I want to go to

The Four-World Casino. Do you take me there, or do I get out and find another driver?"

The Martian turned back to his controls with a sad countenance.

Ford leaned back. No use getting panicky. He had a faint suspicion as to the cause of the pain, but he lacked the technical knowledge on which to found his fears. The best course of action would be to wait and observe how the pain affected his operations at the Casino.

In rapid succession, he thought about his climb upward, of his luxurious apartment in the suburbs, of the way of languorous, wealthy life that had been won through a trick of chance.

But above all these thoughts, chipping at them, was the blade of fire slowly driving itself through his brain.

It would be a relief, he reflected, to scream loudly. But that would make the Martian take him to a Health Center whether he wanted to go or not. Once in a Health Center, defeat would be certain.

And he would not submit easily to defeat. He would try his skill, and if, on some remote chance, he was failing, he would then decide upon a course of action.

Walter Ford let his eyes rest beyond the Martian's shoulder.

Far at the end of the aerial highway, where the road dived like a conduction cable into a mass of machinery, rose the slender and magnificent towers of Cloud City, aglow with the play of a thousand colored light beams.

The battleground. . . .

THE CAB slid neatly into a parking dock.

Ford opened the door and stepped hesitantly to the plastic pavement. He handed his two-solar fare to the Mar-

tian driver, not wanting to look at the man's pained blue expression. He could not afford to give his usual three-solar tip. His source of income might suddenly vanish.

He stopped before the circular entranceway. The Four-World Casino was a large building, built in the shape of a gigantic smooth silver sphere, and dappled with brilliant shimmering dots of white fire that flared and vanished on the polished surface.

Crowds swirled past him into the Casino. Men and women laughed and talked, some drunkenly, but all with the assurance of great wealth. Expensive jeweled robes of the yellow Neptune women brushed against the severe but richly-made tunics of Earth's great. People of a hundred worlds, on vacations, on wedding trips, on excursions, on spending sprees, on binges of wild euphoria. They all streamed into the silver sphere.

Ford drew a deep breath. *The greatest gambling house in the Solar System, and I'm part of it. But for how long?*

Resolutely then, he strode toward the entrance with the gathering crowd. The slate-skinned Venusian doorman bowed slightly and said, "Good evening, Mr. Ford."

Ford nodded in what he hoped was a casual fashion.

Erik Maul stood in the lobby, laughing with a group of Uranian dignitaries. His frame was clothed in a simple tunic of purple cloth, and he played the role of a perfect gentleman. But Ford noticed, as he always did, the scars on Maul's arms and face that could not be concealed. Maul's little black eyes and crew-cut hair gave him an appearance of rough-hewn politeness, but Ford knew that he was not urban at all, but hard and dangerous. He had ingenuity, and that had won him the ownership of the

Casino. But he had ruthlessness, too. That kept the Casino definitely his.

Ford strolled past, and was not the least bit surprised when Maul did not speak, or even glance at him. Ford was an employee of the other man, but a type of employee that Maul would never recognize publicly, or even acknowledge existed.

Beyond the lobby was a sunken dining room, where Venusian waiters served exotic dishes in a dim interior complete with small swishing waterfalls. On one side of the room was a long mirrored bar.

And beyond that, up a long flight of stairs and through a large doorway, Ford could see the main gambling room. Tables stretched in every direction, surrounded by people with hungry, searching faces. Ford recognized some of the other House Telepaths, and realized that it was time for him to be at work. But the pain still clawed at his mind with numbing persistency. He needed a drink, badly.

While Undo Traubwein, the half-Terran half-Venusian bartender, drew him a glass of swamp liquor, Ford examined his face in the mirrored wall behind the bar, taking stock of his situation.

He was not young. Forty had vanished two years before. His hair was still thick and brown, but little laces of gray showed here and there. The eyes were a bit sunken, but the long severe jaw was still relieved by a mildly humorous quirk of the lips.

With my job, thought Ford, a pleasant existence. Without my job, a space bum. Sweat in the stinking crew rooms of the star freighters and burn yourself out in four years or less. Of all the ways to live and die, that was the worst.

"Here you are, Mr. Ford," Traubwein said, setting down the chilled glass of syrupy liquid. Their particular section of the bar was empty, and

Traubwein leaned across confidentially. "Want to gamble me for it?"

Ford was not smiling. Could he win, with the pain? Perhaps he had better find out.

"Sure," he answered quietly, sipping the icy swamp liquor. "Get them out."

TRAUBWEIN extracted a pair of dice from under the bar and shook them in one lumpy hand. "Eleven to one," he was saying. "Easy, Mr. Ford. Only eleven chances to one."

Ford wasn't listening. Harp music floated in the darkness of the dining salon, and the waterfalls rippled coldly. He was struggling to fight the pain.

"Throw them," he whispered.

Traubwein's hand darted up, and opened.

Ford shot his mind forward ten seconds into the future, and focused on the position of the dice as they would land. The impression, though present, was vague.

The dice were falling from Traubwein's hand.

"Five," choked Ford, "five..." He closed his eyes and sought the other number.

The dice tumbled lazily toward the bar. The harp whirled up and up in glittering patterns. Voices made a muted thunder.

"Five," repeated Ford with effort, "...four!"

The dice clacked on the bar and lay there, black dots staring complacently from ivory faces.

Ford looked carefully at the bar. One of the dice bore two pair of dark pinpoints. The other had five.

Ford let his face relax in lines of weary, relieved humor. "Nine," he breathed, "is correct."

Traubwein shook his head as he always did. "Drink on the house, Mr.

Ford. You've got the touch. The old magic touch." He moved to another customer in bewildered pleasure.

Walter Ford slid off the stool and moved around the end of the bar. The first test was beaten. The projection of the future had been blurred, but he had gotten it correctly. He would work after all.

But as he moved to the stairway leading up to the main gambling room, he realized that the pain was now even worse.

He chose Interplanetary Roulette. He liked that best, and there were no other House Telepaths working the table.

Ford approached the cashier's booth and bought ten white chips at a thousand solars apiece. Then he moved toward the game table.

THE GAMBLING room was an expensive insane asylum. Men sat around the poker tables with iron faces and tapped their fingers nervously on the green baize while taciturn Venusians dealt. Women with two-bright eyes gasped and clutched their expensively clad breasts, and shrieked when they won or sobbed hysterically when they lost. Under the pale white glow from the high frescoed ceiling, everyone was brittle and crisp. They could be strengthened in a moment by a turn of good luck, or shattered by chance to empty tinkling wrecks.

Ford managed an inward smile as he took his place at the roulette table. Chips clicked constantly in the room, and breathing was a rushing ocean tide.

It was simple, really. Ford and other men he recognized about the room had a strange gift. They were able to project their minds to a maximum of two minutes into the future along the time continuum. They could see where the wheel would stop, or

how the cards would fall or the dice roll.

That is, if they did not have a piercing knot of fire inside their heads to dim their thought images.

The Venusian croupier raked in the losing chips from the last turn and lisped, "Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen. Place your bets."

Ford waited a moment and then sought the impression. It came, painfully mushrooming up from deep fog banks. His armpits were sticky beneath his tunic, but he dropped a chip on black twenty-one.

The wheel went spinning in a blur of red and black motion. It stopped. The ball came to rest.

Black twenty-one.

Ford pulled in his winnings, ten chips for the one he had bet. Across the table a globular Uranian gentleman emitted what passed for a groan and waved his two suckers helplessly, leaving the table.

The second time was harder. He got an impression of red forty-four.

And the wheel whirled and the little ball bobbed into a red pocket numbered with two fours.

At least, Ford thought, I haven't lost it entirely. Thank God for that.

He noticed two people across the table watching him.

One was a blond young man in what was obviously a rented tunic. He wore it reluctantly, and Ford classified him as a man who was out of place in the Casino. The girl with him was dressed in a pink shimmering gown. Her face was adorned by a very full and determined lower lip, and eyes that were lost between smoke and the sea. She, too, did not fit in the crowd.

But something on both their faces told that, for whatever reason, they had to be there in the Casino! They had to win. Not for amusement, not for the savage drunken thrill of beat-

ing the gods. A piece of life depended on their winning.

A piece of life depends on me getting the numbers right, Ford said to himself. He stabbed for the correct picture. Red eight.

As he dropped his money on the table, he saw that the girl was suddenly conversing with the young man, and then they too placed their money on red eight.

Ford experienced an exhilarating lift in his spirit. This was how it began. This was what Erik Maul paid him for. This was why he got a large salary, and solar checks from postal boxes that bore no return address.

He bet on numbers with house money, and won because of his peculiar skill. He got people on the table to follow his hunches. He built them up, won just so much. Then he got the right number but did not lay his money on the correct square. He lost, and so did they, usually quite a bit. But his money was returned later, to be re-used, like that of all the other House Telepaths.

It was rather tricky. No wired tables. No tabbed cards. No weighted dice. The turnover was such that few visitors who lost ever came back, and gambling laws were nonexistent in Cloud City. Erik Maul cleaned up, and Walter Ford lived well. At the moment, he wanted to continue living well.

THERE WAS a clacking rush and the ball settled in red eight. The girl gave a little cry of pleasure and the young man smiled wanly.

Ford reached for the next number with increasing difficulty.

"Place your bets," came the croupier's slithering voice, "Placeyourbets placeyourbets placeyourbets..."

Ford's hands were clenched on the table edge, digging into the green cloth. His mind was a mass of endless

clouds, empty of color. They rolled and tumbled in turgid motion. He tried to batter his thoughts at them, make them split...split.

And slowly a little shard of light nudged through, and he saw the wheel as if through a gauze curtain. Black...what was it three...nine...thirty-nine...

He dropped his money and the young couple quickly followed suit.

There were no other bets. The other customers were watching the play intently.

Ford did not look at the wheel, but stood with his gaze on the ceiling, until he heard the girl catch her breath in what he thought amounted to happiness.

He was considering a return to the bar for another drink when he saw that the girl was talking excitedly to the croupier. "Please," she was saying breathlessly. "Just a minute..."

"Madam, the rules are that we cannot have more than a two-minute interval between rotations."

"But it won't take even that long," she argued, her short brown hair shaking.

"Wait, Ann," the blond boy said shakily.

"Wait nothing!" She reached into his tunic pocket and extracted a check book, eyes full of the hope that this was the blessed pay-off. She scribbled in the book and ran to the cashier's booth, returning with a stack of white chips.

Good Christ! There must be at least fifty thousand credits. And on this table...ten to one...

Her eyes bored into the older man's, and her full mouth framed one desperate word, "Everything."

She thinks I'm lucky. This is the point where I play the wrong number.

"Will you place your bets?" the croupier said irritably.

The effort was terrible. His mind

strove to rip the dark clouds, but they stuck together, glue-like. Then they opened and shut in an instant, but that was worse than ever. First he caught a glimpse of black twenty-seven, and then the whole image jerked to the side and montaged into red thirty-two.

"Sir," lisped the croupier loudly at Ford. "do you wish to bet?"

The pain rattled his head, kicking against the walls with scorching hot imp's feet. Which number...which number was right. They had to lose...

He decided impulsively that the second number was the correct one. His hand moved a chip in the direction of red four, a random selection.

Coldness washed over him. *The power is slipping away. The old magic power. Without it, I'm nothing. A bum. A poor stinking space bum. I've got to hold on to the touch!*

Savagely, he smashed his fist down on red thirty-two.

No one moved as the girl pushed her pile of chips onto the same square. The croupier observed Ford warily. The globular Uranian came back and watched, his suckers making tiny liquid sighs.

He had to know. He had to keep the touch.

The wheel went spinning. It slowed and the ball skittered. Ford leaned forward intently as the little sphere bounced into black twenty-seven, seemed to hesitate, and jumped to red thirty-two.

The blond boy was grinning foolishly, and the girl laughed and hugged him. "We won," she exclaimed, "we won, Joe, we won!"

"Yeah," the boy called Joe mumbled, "yeah..."

Ford was washed clean of even the pain. He had gotten the right number, but they had bet on his choice and won, when he should have seen to it

that they lost. Fifty thousand...at ten to one...ten to one...

"This table," said the croupier slowly, chiseled eyes on Ford, "is closed."

The girl rushed around to the older man, seizing his arms. "You're lucky," she said, "you're so lucky, and we needed that money so badly. Passage back to Earth. The rates are so high. We didn't have very much, and you were so lucky..." Small tears welled from her smoky-blue eyes, and she stood quickly on tiptoe and brushed her lips against his face. They were faintly moist and hot....

"Thanks," said the young man called Joe awkwardly, extending one hand. Ford shook it woodenly, hearing only part of the words. "Oxygen farm...wiped out in formaldehyde storm up country in the jungle...almost everything gone...sister and I...money...chance...family...new start...back...Earth..."

And then they were gone, and the activity of the room went on unabated.

Ford stood rigid, not daring to move. The pain flashed and clanged through his whole body.

A hand fastened on his arm.

"I think," came the lisping voice of the croupier, "that Mr. Maul will wish to see you."

He made a signal to someone and they moved off through the crowd.

THE ROOM was quite small, and hidden in a maze of false walls and panels that could only be negotiated by employees of the Casino. The croupier had vanished, and Ford waited for the next move.

Erik Maul rose from the straight chair behind his slab-like desk of gray jungle wood. His brows were drawn together, juts of hair hanging out over eyes that were filled with vague displeasure. His mouth, on the

other hand, rose and fell spasmodically in a smile, and the ridged scars near his nostrils appeared to jiggle and dance.

"Walter," Maul said with a moderately generous air, "that cost me a lot of money." He gave Ford no chance to reply, moving to the wall and pulling back the drapes decorated in orange and green with intertwining winged snakes and naked women.

"But I don't mind the money. That doesn't worry me, because I'm getting it back." He indicated the wall that was now exposed.

Ford had seen the window before. It overlooked a great expanse of darkness, which was in reality a very large sunken room. Far down at the bottom, bound in a circle of light, a man and women groveled and clawed at the floor. Joe and Ann.

Their heads were tilted upward, pleading, but Ford knew they could not see their observers. Their clothes were dirty, and their faces were drawn in lines of almost unbelievable insane terror.

"When we throw them out via the rear entrance, they won't have any desire to collect their winnings," Maul explained casually, taking a glass of pale blue liquor from a wall dispenser. "Subsonic waves are quite effective. Although below the threshold of human hearing, they nevertheless generate feelings of mad, unexplainable terror that can completely overwhelm a personality, and make it cringing and weak. They won't come back."

Ford was appalled by the sight of frenzied unreasoning fear that showed itself in the couple groveling in the pool of light. For a moment he was unaware that Maui had jerked the curtains closed and returned to his desk.

"Sit down," Maul said gently, with no hint of the ruthlessness.

When Ford complied, he began quietly, "Walter, you can see why the money part doesn't bother me. But you made a bad maneuver. If I didn't know you I'd say it was a deliberate cross."

"It wasn't for the solars," Ford replied in a thick voice. "It wasn't for the solars at all."

Maul tinkled the ice in his glass. "Explain."

Ford told him the story with labored slowness, from the beginnings of mental vagueness that morning, to his desperate attempt to retain the touch of projection, that had resulted in the winnings of the girl and her brother.

When he finished, he stared at the floor dejectedly.

"I believe you," Maul admitted. "I believe you because you've been with me quite a while, and because I know you know it would be dangerous to cross me. I want to help you, and I'd like to keep you working for me. My House Telepaths are no good to me unless their minds are in perfect working order."

There it is, thought Ford. The first slip in the long fall back to emptiness. "I'd like to keep you working for me..." Without the Casino, nothing...

"Do you have any idea as to the cause?" Maul wanted to know.

"The only possible explanation I can find is that the radiation exposure that caused my mind to be able to visualize the future has somehow run its course of beneficial effects, and is developing harmful ones."

"When were you exposed? I remember your telling me, but..."

"Six years ago, on the freighter *Marsport Queen*, just off Europa. I was working in the damping room when the pile shieldings broke. The blast knocked me out for three days, and when I awoke, I got flashes of what my situation would be, a few

seconds in the future. There were no other bad effects then, and there haven't been any up to now. I learned to control the projections, and you hired me off that Jovian gambling ship and brought me here, along with the other Telepaths you'd picked up through the system."

Maul nodded. "So many details. Hard to remember. Tell me, do you think it's possible that reaction may have taken this long?"

FORD PONDERED for a bit, then answered, "I don't really know. I'm no technologist, but I have heard that some artificial isotopes have a long half-life. And the isotopes they were using on the *Queen*, her being a tramp ship, may have been pretty tricky."

Maul was busy pulling back the top of his desk and dialing a visor number. A Venusian appeared, flattened out on the crystal desk-top screen.

"Put in a call to Berger," Maul ordered. "Get him to his office right away, and send me a driver." He slid the panel shut without further comment.

"Walter, I'm sending you to a friend of mine, Dr. Berger. He works for me, and he's the best mediophysician available. We've got to find out how bad this is."

"You'll give me chance, won't you?" Ford whispered raspingly. "You won't throw me out, will you, Erik..."

"I know what's bothering you, Walter. When I picked you up, you were just another tramp worker. The touch gave you an angle. That's all anybody needs. Just one good angle."

"I've seen a good many like you, Walter. Never had anything, and bingo, the gods drop a gift in their lap good for a lifetime ticket to a cash paradise. And if they ever start to lose the angle, they fight. They

kick and squirm at the end of the hook because they don't want to give up the cash paradise they never really earned.

"Maybe that's right, maybe it isn't. I've been in the same position, but I've made sure there was more than one angle, and that each one was backed up."

Ford was folded weakly in his chair, suddenly very old and useless. The fast ride to the top, and the long, long fall. No talent, or desire for anything but the pranks of fortune.

"You'll throw me out," Ford began. He was unable to finish.

"If you're washed up," Maul agreed. "If your talent for projection is going to pieces, I'll let you go." His voice softened a trifle. "I'm giving you this chance because you've been a good worker. But if the doc says you're no good, I'll have to let you go."

A small bulb glowed on the desk.

"Come," said Maul, and a uniformed Venusian appeared.

"Take Mr. Ford to Dr. Berger's quarters and wait to bring him back."

Ford stumbled to his feet, bumping against the gray man. He felt strong hands on his arm, guiding him. He didn't watch where he was going, letting himself be led. As they moved through a narrow crooked hallway, he heard the panel to Maul's office close.

Ford imagined that it was a kind of curtain. The play might be over, and he might be forced to leave the glittering theatre for the hell of the ordinary world.

LIGHT AND garbage-tainted noise washed over the alley from the wire-covered windows of the kitchen. Ford climbed into the rear seat of the runabout, and the driver headed the machine toward the street.

The route he chose was an unfor-

tunate one. He turned the vehicle at a brightly-lit gate and drove up a steep incline to the East-West Causeway. As the runabout purred along, Ford watched the sky, now dark of searchlights to allow the Terran population a little sleep.

Below the elevated highway, huddled together in an inky mass, lay Rocketville.

Rocketville was the slum section of Cloud City. It was completely Terran, an outpost of the criminal and the second-class spaceman. Down there in the shadowy world of cheap frame buildings, the lost Earthmen wandered, eyes and bellies hungry. Anything could be bought in Rocketville. Women, or dope, or a hundred other illicit pleasures.

The sight of the section made Ford sweat. Rocketville, stronghold of corruption. Empire of rusty, dirt-covered dreams. Final stop on the road to nothing.

The runabout crept by a lighted stairway that led down.

Down, thought Ford, to a finish for purpose. Down to skimpy pallets and knives in the throat for a tin of vitamin concentrate.

He watched Rocketville, fascinated. A flame-gas sign reared its serpentine head in letters of angry, bleeding scarlet. *Stardrift Hotel.*

Drift, ran the words in Ford's aching head, drift, drift to nothing.

He seized the shoulder of the Venusian driver.

"Hurry up," he snarled. The man nodded imperceptibly and stepped on the accelerator. . . .

DOCTOR BERGER had a spacious office in a large professional quadrangle. He opened the glassite door to Ford's knock, inviting him in.

The doctor was a fat man, with black-rimmed glasses, stringy hair

and lips like cords of pink rope. Whenever he opened his mouth, his teeth jutted into prominence like carefully-scrubbed cliffs.

"Come inside," he said, stifling a yawn. "Maul always did want service at an ungodly hour."

Ford entered the doctor's laboratory, a maze of tubes and glass contraptions that twined to the ceiling. A desk light threw hulking deformed shadows on the walls.

"We'll dispense with the usual record, name, date of birth and all that. I take it Maul just wants to find out what's wrong with you." He took off his glasses and peered at Ford. "Something *is* wrong, isn't it?" He sounded as if something had to be wrong, when he was called out of bed in the middle of the night.

"I've been having pains in my head," Ford told him.

"Give me all the pertinent facts."

Ford hesitated. No one was supposed to know about the inner workings of Maul's Casino.

"Come come," admonished the doctor, seeing his reluctance, "do you think Erik Maul would keep me on his payroll if he thought I couldn't be trusted?" He grinned sourly. "I never gamble in the Casino. I know how the Telepaths work."

"May I sit down?" Ford asked weakly.

Berger frowned and looked about, finally dragging over a wooden bench. He lit a cigarette and observed the shadows on the wall as Ford began his narrative.

Minutes later, he dropped the cigarette on the floor and stepped on it. "This way," he said, and his voice was hushed.

He led Ford to a large cabinet, one side of which was an opaque crystal screen. "Step inside," he directed, moving to a bank of dials. He adjusted the strangely calibrated knobs

and flicked a switch.

Light came from the crystal screen, and an object took shape. The gray hilly landscape of a human brain.

Berger searched for a faint purple radiance. He found it, and reluctantly switched off the machine.

"You may come out," he said to Ford. He fumbled in his shirt pocket and brought forth a crumpled package, extending it to the other man.

"Cigarette?"

"No. No thanks. Did you find anything?"

"What you suspected, Mr. Ford, is true. The exposure encountered six years ago has only now begun to take effect. Primary radiation disintegration of the brain has set in."

Ford closed his fingers tightly around a fold of his cloak. "How bad is it?"

Doctor Berger drew the cigarette from his mouth, exhaling with a faint flapping sound. "The pain will continue with increasing severity."

"Isn't there any remedy?"

"None."

"But I've got to have perfect mental coordination!" Ford's voice was frenzied. "I can't work unless I have that!"

"You needn't worry about working." Berger returned to the bench and picked up his glasses. "You will not live more than four months."

Ford swallowed. The gulping sound was queer and ludicrous. "There's absolutely nothing you can do?"

Berger pulled open a gray wall cabinet and took down a small lead cylinder.

"Inside, there is a hypodermic, filled with an aqueous solution of a strong radioactive isotope. If you wish, you can inject this into your bloodstream when the pain becomes too severe. It will relieve the pain for a period of about a week, but death will then

come very quickly. It will be painless. Otherwise, the final weeks will become nearly unbearable at the close."

Ford pocketed it numbly. "How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing," Berger replied. "I work for Erik Maul." He paused, and added, "So long as I'm able."

HE LET Ford out the door, where the Venusian waited. In the lift tube down to street level, Ford accepted the fact that he was already dead. The wealthy gambler was gone, and would be forgotten. His road to a rich life had ended abruptly at a strange foggy door, beyond which he could not see.

Again they drove on the Causeway over Rocketville, and again the Stardrift Hotel seemed to beckon with red hands, *Come to Rocketville, where life is for nothing...*

Despite the pain, Ford sat bolt upright in the rear of the runabout.

An idea nudged its way from the back of his mind. The idea grew and ballooned, laughing insanely, until it threw down all other ideas and remained triumphant, a mocking and monstrous ruler of his being.

He was going to die. That he could almost accept. It came eventually to everyone.

But he was going to die without purpose!

Walter Ford was linked with the race of Earthmen by many of the same desires, motives and appetites. Like every other Terran, from the great Imperators in the Asteroid Palaces, to the most sodden and diseased whore in Rocketville, his whole life had been a struggle to prove that Walter Ford had meant something, as an individual, to the world he lived in.

He tried to argue that Walter Ford would leave something finer, something more beautiful in the world of

the stars, even if it was only a memory. But he had nothing that would ever be of any use to anybody. His own gift had always been used to his own ends.

That was the final muddy bottom of the fall; the knowledge that nothing in the great pulsing universe of space would be different or better because he had lived....

He relaxed and let the pain flow through him. Why not use the hypodermic? In a week there would be an end to uselessness. Why not go down to Rocketville and wait in the vacuum for death to come?

But he knew that he must seek an opportunity to prove, in some small way, that his life had been worth something to one more person other than himself.

He fought the pleading bloody brightness of the Stardrift Hotel, and ultimately won. Once he almost touched the shoulder of the Venusian and asked to be let out, but he jerked his hand back at the last moment.

The runabout sped on, and Walter Ford sat there, blindly searching for one shimmer of value in a totally meaningless existence....

FORD WAITED in the alley while the runabout backed up and headed for the parking lot. Completely at a loss for action or thought, he gazed vacantly at the wire-grill windows of the Casino kitchen. Plates rattled, and there was a hiss of steam and a voice growling through the fetid air, "Hurry up you gray bastard hurry up with the order them people are waiting say for Jesus sake will you hurry up...."

He raised his hand to knock at the rear door. His head throbbed dully.

Hardness ground into his back.

"Wait," a voice ordered doubtfully. "Wait or I'll kill you."

He lowered his hand with obvious

caution, sensing a familiar strain in the voice. It seemed to struggle against a creeping fear.

"You're going to take me in there," the voice went on, edge of force fighting to slice at the fear. "I won the money, and I'm going to make them give it back. You're going to take me in there or I'll kill you."

He recognized the voice. "May I turn around?" he asked.

The hardness vanished. "All right. But slowly."

Her pink gown was torn and dirty, and the ravages of the subsonic waves were plainly stamped on her face. But the gun was steady, checkered into little yellow squares by the light from the kitchen windows.

Her eyes squeezed together, peering, and then she caught her breath. "You...the lucky one. Do...you work for them?"

He nodded.

Resolution drained from her, then flooded back. "I'm still going in. My brother's at a charity Health Center. Whatever they did to us, when they took our money, hurt his mind. The doctor said he needed special therapy. Expensive therapy. And we've got to get back to Earth and our family."

"You're still afraid, aren't you?" Ford asked gently.

"Very much afraid, but there are things stronger than fear. I want to exist, Mr. lucky-whatever-you-are, and existence depends on getting back to Earth. Everything on Venus for my brother and I..." Her voice slid down the scale, shivered and broke, "...is smashed."

This, thought Ford suddenly, could give meaning to emptiness.

"Give me the gun," he said.

She jabbed it in his middle. "We're going inside."

"Give me the gun!" His voice was firm, yet quiet. "I'm going to help you. Please."

She peered at the checkerboard pattern of his face in the kitchen glow, and put the heavy automatic in his open hand. Ford's fingers closed over the cool steel. She buried her face in her hands, sobbing.

"Listen carefully," he instructed, feeling the exciting tingle of a real purpose. "Get a cab and bring it to the front entrance."

"I don't have any money," she choked. "They threw me out a few minutes ago when I tried to get back in..."

He gave her a solar note from his tunic. "This will get the cab. Keep the motor running. When I come out, have the driver go very rapidly."

Bewildered, she saw him knock at the door, and then vanish a moment later as it slid shut. She hurried down the alley, puzzled....

IT WAS dark in the hall, but he knew the way to Maul's office. Glancing about to assure himself that no one watched, he took Berger's hypodermic from his pocket and removed the lead casing.

He wished for alcohol to swab his arm, but plunged the needle in nevertheless. There was no hesitation, no fear. This was a meaning for death...

A wave of cool dreaminess flooded over him. Then it and the pain were gone.

He manipulated a panel, hurried down a second hall, and soon stood before Erik Maul, smiling pleasantly.

"What's the verdict, Walter?" Maul asked affably.

"Nothing wrong," Ford lied, "absolutely nothing. Temporary migraine, that's all. Gave me some medicine that fixed me up."

"Is that the truth?" Maul said.

"Got a deck of cards?" The reply was almost bantering.

Maul spread the deck face down before him. Ford, with his back to the

desk, said, "Put your hand on a card."

"Got it."

Ford reached haltingly for the impression, expecting it to blur. But as Berger had predicted, the radioactive solution had removed the pain and made him able to think clearly and with absolute precision.

"Jack of diamonds," Ford announced loudly.

Maul exhaled. "Correct."

"Another."

"Got it." Maul's hand reached for one card, started to turn it, then quickly flashed to another instead.

"Three of clubs...no...eight of hearts."

"Eight is right." Maul turned up the first card also. Three black clubs seemed to grin at him in triumph.

He slapped Ford's back in a friendly fashion. "Walt, you're okay. Feel like going back to work?"

"Very much so."

Maul gestured expansively. "Then go right ahead."

Ford paused in his passage to the door. He had to know one thing, before he pulled the cross.

"Erik," he said, "if something ever does go wrong, will you kick me out?"

"This is a business, Walter." Maul caressed one of the scars along his nose. "I'd have to let you go."

"No room for friendship?"

Maul laughed. The sound was gratifying. "You know the answer. This is a business. No friendship when you're no good."

Ford smiled wanly and started through the maze of panels and hallways to the gambling room.

Activity continued unabated. His watch said eight minutes before five in the morning, but the women still had grasping eyes, and the men still tapped nervously on the green baize.

He returned to the Interplanetary Roulette table, now reopened. The

croupier's gray face rose in bewilderment, and then froze once more in taciturn lines.

Ford drew out nearly all of his solars, or rather, the solars Maul had sent him. One hundred and twenty thousand.

"No chips," he said to the croupier. "Just this one bet."

The man frowned. Ford edged closer to him, swinging out his cloak and pressing the gun against the man's side. No one else at the table saw the weapon.

His mind reached out easily, grasping red fourteen. He dropped his money.

"Spin the wheel."

It flashed in a blurring circle, and the ball jumped into a red slot.

"Fourteen," wheezed the croupier, "wins."

"Walk with me to the cashier," Ford ordered. The Venusian complied, eyes darting furiously over the crowd. None of the others in the room seemed to notice.

"One hundred and twenty thousand solars," Ford said to the cashier, "at ten to one." He jammed the gun against the Venusian's side and laughed harshly. "Isn't that right?"

"That," murmured the Venusian, "is right."

Astounded, the cashier handed over a roll of solar notes.

"Move ahead of me," Ford commanded. They proceeded leisurely through the now-closed dining salon. The harp plunked weakly, and the waterfalls fell with dribbling slowness. The Venusian knew better than to run.

Undo Traubwein was arguing at the bar with a skinny High Martian youth in evening dress.

"The world," exclaimed the Martian drunkenly, "and the universe, is one of science. There is no place for superstition, necromancy, magic..."

it's a world of infallible logic."

"Be good, Undo," Ford smiled as he strolled past the bar.

Traubwein waved one gray hand, and turned to his Martian companion. "There, mister, goes one man that's got the magic."

THEY WERE almost to the front entrance when the Venusian made his break. He bounded forward, whirled, and yanked out a little knife. "Assist!" he yelled to everyone in general, and rushed at Ford. A Neptune woman shrieked in a high-pitched whine, drawing her scale cape tightly about her.

Ford shot rapidly five times. The Venusian took a halting step, gurgling. "Assist." Pale ichor filled his mouth and dripped over. He sagged and fell.

Ford was through the entrance, shoving the doorman out of the way. A cab ground to a stop and he leaped in. A moment later, they were roaring away through the streets.

He refused to let the girl talk. He ordered the driver to take him to the East-West Causeway and drop him off. Then he turned to her.

"Here's the money. Don't ask how I got it, or why. It will take Maul a little while to get organized. By that time you can be with your brother at the Health Center. They'll never find you, or even connect you with me. All I ask is that you remember, when you're back on Earth, that a lucky man did you a favor."

She could not cry. It seemed wrong to sob helplessly when such a man as this was speaking.

The cab stopped.

"East-West Causeway, Earth sir," the Martian driver said obsequiously.

Ford peeled off a ten-solar note from the pile on the seat. "You never saw me, or the girl."

"Yes, Earth sir." The blue face ra-

diated servility. "Most assuredly, Earth sir."

Ford climbed out of the car and stood leaning on the door.

He smiled at the girl and brushed at his graying hair in an embarrassed fashion. "I wish I weren't so old. I've forgotten your name."

"Ann. What's your name? I want to remember."

"I'm just the one who was lucky."

He closed the door and waved to the driver. The cab shot away through a maze of buildings.

FORD WALKED rapidly up the Causeway beside the early-morning traffic. The foggy sky was beginning to flicker with the glow of dim searchlights. Just another morning in Cloud City.

He felt surprisingly fine. There was no pain. His head was a perfect crystal ball. A week . . . and then . . .

But it would be quiet, Berger had said.

Ford considered returning to his apartment, but Maul would certainly begin any search there. There was one place, however, where Maul would never seek him.

He came to a stairway going down.

He glanced over the railing to the frame-building cheapness of Rocketville. *Come*, beckoned the bloody flame-gas sign, *come to the Stardrift Hotel, last outpost of futility* . . .

No, he thought, *not any more*, and walked down the stairs.

He emerged from the shadow of one of the great pillars supporting the Causeway. Somebody shouted in the artificial dawn, and a beam-gun sizzled in the distance.

From a small bar, a trumpet screamed in golden anguish, and drums cracked and slammed in a frenzy of Terran joy.

Very calmly, he approached the front of the Stardrift Hotel and stepped inside.

The lobby was dim behind the spotted glass windows. A slovenly Earthman leaned against the counter, picking his teeth. His bloated stomach shoved against a candy-cane shirt.

On a leather couch, a drunken blond jet-man wrestled with a woman whose face was scabrous with disease. "No, honey," she moaned, "no not now I can't oh no not now..."

"What can I do for you?" said the candy-shirted man, as if he didn't care in the least.

Ford examined his tunic. Two fifty-solar notes left.

"A room. Any room."

The fat man flung him a key. "Number eleven. To the left of the stairs."

"And send me up some cigarettes

and..." Ford hesitated. It had been a long, long time. "And—yes—some beer." The fat man grabbed the solar note.

"Just a minute," he said as Ford turned away. "We're gonna need our rooms end of next week. Big fleet of cargo liners in from Antares. How long you planning to stay?"

From far away came the tortured angel scream of the trumpet, and beyond the spotted windows the searchlights of the Causeway high above began to flicker in the foggy sky.

"Not long," Ford replied. "Not long at all."

He moved briskly up the creaking stairs.

THE END

BLOW-HARD TEST

★ By A. T. Kedzie ★

PROBING the upper atmosphere with balloons and rockets is old hat. Radio and radar tests of these nebulous volumes are also familiar methods of finding out about the mysterious regions of the air some twenty to forty miles above us. But scientists are continually trying out new methods. Recently they've hit upon an ingenious technique for grabbing facts from the icy stratosphere.

It seems that sound waves of very low frequency are excellent messengers from the sky. The problem is to get waves of low enough frequency and great enough power. It has been found that two or three hundred pound charges of TNT make explosions exactly suitable for the purpose. Spaced about a hundred miles or so apart on the rim of a circle, the charges are detonated and the powerful sound waves hurled into the sky. Changes in temperature and density cause reflection of the waves and the bounce back to Earth where they're picked up by ultra-sensitive artillery sound ranging instruments.

Experience enables interpretation of the information thus relayed. Oscillographic records are taken and kept and thus another step is taken toward an understanding of the higher regions which Man is soon going to explore a lot more thoroughly—in person!

A SCIENCE PARADOX

★ By Pete Bogg ★

YOU CAN cause an awful lot of embarrassment in scientific circles if you just casually drop a remark into the conversation such as, "what about the toroid paradox." Science is filled with paradoxes, plenty of which haven't been fully resolved and which seem to contradict the very theories which created them. This problem of the toroid is a gem.

A toroidal solenoid is simply a doughnut shaped piece of wood or iron wrapped with wire. Pass an electric current through this solenoid and you have an electromagnet whose "field" is supposed to be entirely located within the coil itself. In other words there are no "lines of force" outside the wire, but all are inside the toroid.

The trouble is that if you put another winding on the outside, it may be one turn or more, energy is transferred from the toroid to this second winding—in essence, a simple transformer action takes place. But the damned thing can't work because the lines of force are still inside the toroid winding. But it does work!

How?

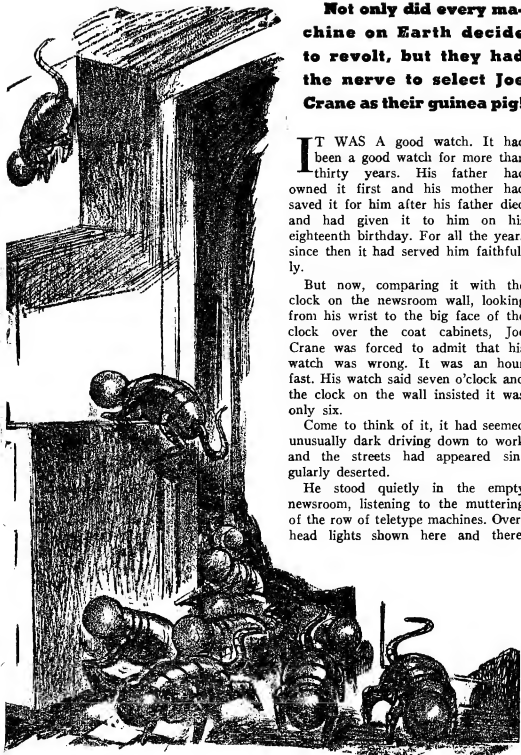
Don't ask the scientific boys that one. They simply can't answer it. And it causes an awful lot of hemming and hawing and bumping of gums. "We don't know... but it works..."

BATHE YOUR BEARINGS IN BLOOD!

By Clifford Simak



He raised the bar defensively as the horde of weird creatures swarmed into the room...



Not only did every machine on Earth decide to revolt, but they had the nerve to select Joe Crane as their guinea pig!

IT WAS A good watch. It had been a good watch for more than thirty years. His father had owned it first and his mother had saved it for him after his father died and had given it to him on his eighteenth birthday. For all the years since then it had served him faithfully.

But now, comparing it with the clock on the newsroom wall, looking from his wrist to the big face of the clock over the coat cabinets, Joe Crane was forced to admit that his watch was wrong. It was an hour fast. His watch said seven o'clock and the clock on the wall insisted it was only six.

Come to think of it, it had seemed unusually dark driving down to work and the streets had appeared singularly deserted.

He stood quietly in the empty newsroom, listening to the muttering of the row of teletype machines. Overhead lights shown here and there,

gleaming on waiting telephones, on typewriters, on the china whiteness of the pastepots huddled in a group on the copy desk.

Quiet now, he thought, quiet and peace and shadows, but in another hour the place would spring to life. Ed Lane, the news editor, would arrive at six-thirty and shortly after that Frank McKay, the city editor, would come lumbering in.

Crane put up a hand and rubbed his eyes. He could have used that extra hour of sleep. He could have...

Wait a minute! He had not gotten up by the watch upon his wrist. The alarm clock had awakened him. And that meant the alarm clock was an hour fast, too.

"It don't make sense," said Crane, aloud.

He shuffled past the copy desk, heading for his chair and typewriter. Something moved on the desk alongside the typewriter—a thing that glinted, rat-sized and shiny and with a certain, undefinable manner about it that made him stop short in his tracks with a sense of gulping emptiness in his throat and belly.

The thing squatted beside the typewriter and stared across the room at him. There was no sign of eyes, no hint of face, and yet he knew it stared.

Acting almost instinctively, Crane reached out and grabbed a pastepot off the copy desk. He hurled it with a vicious motion and it became a white blur in the lamplight, spinning end over end. It caught the staring thing squarely, lifted it and swept it off the desk. The pastepot hit the floor and broke, scattering broken shards and oozy gobs of half-dried paste.

The shining thing hit the floor somersaulting. Its feet made metallic sounds as it righted itself and dashed across the floor.

Crane's hand scooped up a spike, heavily weighed with metal. He threw it with a sudden gush of hatred and revulsion. The spike hit the floor with a thud ahead of the running thing and drove its point deep into the wood.

The metal rat made splinters fly as it changed its course. Desperately, it flung itself through the three-inch opening of a supply cabinet door.

Crane sprinted swiftly, hit the door with both his hands and slammed it shut.

"Got you," he said.

He thought about it, standing with his back against the door.

Scared, he thought. Scared silly by a shining thing that looked something like a rat. Maybe it was a rat, a white rat. And, yet, it hadn't had a tail. It didn't have a face. Yet it had looked at him.

Crazy, he said. Crane, you're going nuts.

IT DIDN'T quite make sense. It didn't fit into this morning of October 18, 1952. Nor into the Twentieth Century. Nor into normal human life.

He turned around, grasped the door knob firmly and wrenched, intending to throw it wide open in one sudden jerk. But the knob slid beneath his fingers and would not move and the door stayed shut.

Locked, thought Crane. The lock snapped home when I slammed the door. And I haven't got the key. Dorothy has the key, but she always leaves it open because it's hard to get it open once it's locked. She almost always has to call one of the janitors. Maybe there's some of the maintenance men around. Maybe I should hunt one up and tell him—

Tell him what? Tell him I saw a metal rat run into the cabinet? Tell him I threw a pastepot at it and

knocked it off the desk? That I threw a spike at it, too, and to prove it, there's the spike sticking in the floor.

Crane shook his head.

He walked over to the spike and yanked it from the floor. He put the spike back on the copy desk and kicked the fragments of the pastepot out of sight.

At his own desk, he selected three sheets of paper and rolled them into the typewriter.

The machine started to type. All by itself without him touching it! He sat stupefied and watched its keys go up and down.

It typed:

Keep out of this, Joe. Don't mix into this. You might get hurt.

Joe Crane pulled the sheets of copy paper out of the machine. He balled them in his fist and threw them into a wastebasket. Then he went out to get a cup of coffee.

"You know, Louie," he said to the man behind the counter, "a man lives alone too long and he gets to seeing things."

"Yeah," said Louie. "Me, I'd go nuts in that place of yours. Rattling around in it empty-like. Should have sold it when your old lady passed on."

"Couldn't," said Crane. "It's been my home too long."

"Ought to get married off, then," said Louie. "Ain't good to live by yourself."

"Too late now," Crane told him. "There isn't anyone who would put up with me."

"I got a bottle hid out," said Louie. "Couldn't give you none across the counter, but I could put some in your coffee."

Crane shook his head. "Got a hard day coming up."

"You sure? I won't charge you for it. Just old friends."

"No. Thank you, Louie."

"You been seeing things?" asked

Louie in a questioning voice.

"Seeing things?"

"Yeah. You said a man lives too much alone and he gets to seeing things?"

"Just a figure of speech," said Crane.

He finished the cup of coffee quickly and went back to the office.

The place looked more familiar now.

Ed Lane was there, cussing out a copy boy. Frank McKay was clipping the opposition morning sheet. A couple of other reporters had drifted in.

Crane took a quick look at the supply cabinet door and it still was shut.

THE PHONE on McKay's desk buzzed and the city editor picked it up. He listened for a moment, then took it down from his ear and held his hand over the mouthpiece.

"Joe," he said, "take this. Some screwball claims he met a sewing machine coming down the street."

Crane reached for his phone.

"Give me the call on 246," he told the operator.

A voice was saying in his ear, "This the *Herald*? This the *Herald*? Hello, there..."

"This is Crane," said Joe.

"I want the *Herald*," said the man. "I want to tell 'em..."

"This is Crane, of the *Herald*," Crane told him. "What's on your mind?"

"You a reporter?"

"Yeah, I'm a reporter."

"Then listen close. I'll try to tell this slow and easy and just the way it happened. I was walking down the street, see..."

"What street?" asked Crane. "And what is your name?"

"East Lake," said the caller. "The five or six hundred block, I don't re-

member which. And I met this sewing machine rolling along the street and I thought, thinking the way you would, you know, if you met a sewing machine... I thought somebody had been rolling it along and it had gotten away from them. Although that is funny, because the street is level. There's no grade to it at all, you see. Sure, you know the place. Level as the palm of your hand. And there wasn't a soul in sight. It was early morning, see..."

"What's your name?" asked Crane.

"My name? Smith, that's my name. Jeff Smith. And so I figured maybe I'd ought to help this guy the sewing machine had gotten away from, so I put out my hand to stop it and it dodged. It..."

"It did what?" yelled Crane.

"It dodged. So help me, mister. When I put my hand out to stop it, it dodged out of the way so I couldn't catch it. As if it knew I was trying to catch it, see, and it didn't want to be caught. So it dodged out of the way and went around me and down the street as fast as it could go, picking up speed as it went. And when it got to the corner, it turned the corner as slick as you please and..."

"What's your address?" asked Crane.

"My address? Say, what do you want my address for? I was telling you about this sewing machine. I called you up to give you a story and you keep interrupting..."

"I got to have your address," Crane told him, "if I'm going to write the story."

"Oh, all right then, if that is the way it is. I live at 203 North Hampton and I work at Axel Machines. Run a lathe, you know. And I haven't had a drink in weeks. I'm cold sober now."

"All right," said Crane. "Go ahead

and tell me."

"Well, there isn't much else to tell. Only when this machine went past me I had the funny feeling that it was watching me. Out of the corner of its eyes, kind of. And how is a sewing machine going to watch you. A sewing machine hasn't got any eyes and..."

"What made you think it was watching you?"

"I don't know, mister. Just a feeling. Like my skin was trying to roll up my back."

"Mr. Smith," asked Crane, "have you ever seen a thing like this before? Say, a washing machine or something else?"

"I ain't drunk," said Smith. "Haven't had a drop in weeks. I never saw nothing like this before. But I'm telling you the truth, mister. I got a good reputation. You can call up anyone and ask them. Call Johnny Jacobson up at the Red Rooster grocery. He knows me. He can tell you about me. He can tell you..."

"Sure, sure," said Crane, pacifying him. "Thanks for calling, Mr. Smith."

You and a guy named Smith, he told himself. Both of you are nuts. You saw a metal rat and your typewriter talked back at you and now this guy meets a sewing machine strolling down the street.

DOROTHY GRAHAM, the managing editor's secretary, went past his desk, walking rapidly, her high heels coming down with decisive clicks. Her face was flushed an angry pink and she was jingling a ring of keys in her hands.

"What's the matter, Dorothy?" Crane asked.

"It's that damn door again," she said. "The one to the supply cabinet. I just know I left it open and now some goof comes along and closes it

and the lock snaps."

"Keys won't open it?" asked Crane.

"Nothing will open it," she snapped. "Now I got to get George up here again. He knows how to do it. Talks to it or something. It makes me so mad, Boss called up last night and said for me to be down early and get the wire recorder for Albertson. He's going out on that murder trial up north and wants to get some of the stuff down on tape. So I get up early and what does it get me. I lose my sleep and don't even stop for breakfast and now..."

"Get an axe," said Crane. "That will open it."

"The worst of it," said Dorothy, "is that George never gets the lead out. He always says he'll be right up and then I wait and wait and I call again and he says..."

"Crane!" McKay's roar echoed through the room.

"Yeah," said Crane.

"Anything to that sewing machine story?"

"Guy says he met one."

"Anything to it?"

"How the hell would I know? I got the guy's word, that's all."

"Well, call up some other people down in that neighborhood. Ask them if they saw a sewing machine running around loose. Might be good for a humorous piece."

"Sure," said Crane.

He could imagine it:

"This is Crane at the *Herald*. Got a report there's a sewing machine running around loose down in your neighborhood. Wondering if you saw anything of it. Yes, lady, that's what I said...a sewing machine running around. No, ma'm, no one pushing it. Just running around..."

He slouched out of his chair, went over to the reference table, picked up the city directory and lugged it back

to the desk.

Doggedly, he opened the book, located the East Lake listings and made some notes of names and addresses. He dawdled, reluctant to start phoning. He walked to the window and looked out at the weather. He wished he didn't have to work. He thought of the kitchen sink at home. Plugged up again. He'd taken it apart and there were couplings and pipes and union joints spread all over the place. Today, he thought, would be a nice day to fix that sink.

When he went back to the desk, McKay came and stood over him.

"What do you think of it, Joe?"

"Screwball," said Crane, hoping McKay would call it off.

"Good feature story, though," said the editor. "Have some fun with it."

"Sure," said Crane.

MCKAY LEFT and Crane made some calls. He got the sort of reaction that he expected.

He started to write the story. It didn't go so well.

A sewing machine went for a stroll down Lake street this morning...

He ripped out the sheet and threw it in the wastebasket.

He dawdled some more, then wrote!

A man met a sewing machine rolling down Lake Street this morning and the man lifted his hat most politely and said to the sewing machine...

He ripped out the sheet.

He tried again:

Can a sewing machine walk? That is, can it go for a walk without someone pushing it or pulling it or...

He tore out the sheet, inserted a new one, then got up and started for the water fountain to get a drink.

"Getting something, Joe?" McKay asked.

"Have it for you in a while," said Crane.

He stopped at the picture desk and Ballard, the picture editor, handed him the morning's offerings.

"Nothing much to pep you up," said Ballard. "All the gals got a bad dose of modesty today."

Crane looked through the sheaf of pictures. There wasn't, truth to tell, as much feminine epidermis as usual, although the gal who was Miss Manile Rope wasn't bad at all.

"The place is going to go to hell," mourned Ballard, "if those picture services don't send us better pornography than this. Look at the copy desk. Hanging on the ropes. Nothing to show them to snap them out of it."

Crane went and got his drink.

On the way back he stopped to pass the time of day at the news desk.

"What's exciting, Ed?" he asked.

"Those guys in the east are nuts," said the news editor. "Look at this one, will you."

The dispatch read:

Cambridge, Mass. (UP) Oct. 18—Harvard University's electron-brain, the Mark III, disappeared today.

It was there last night. It was gone this morning.

University officials said that it is impossible for anyone to have made away with the machine. It weighs 10 tons and measures 30 by 15 feet...

Crane laid the yellow sheet of paper back on the news desk...carefully. He went back, slowly, to his chair.

There was writing on the sheet of paper in his machine.

CRANE READ it through once in sheer panic, read it through again with slight understanding.

The lines read:

A sewing machine, having become aware of its true identity and its place in the universal scheme, as-

serted its independence this morning by trying to go for a walk along the streets of this supposedly free city.

A human tried to catch it, intent upon returning it as a piece of property to its "owner" and when the machine eluded him, the human called a newspaper office, by that calculated action setting the full force of the humans of this city upon the trail of the liberated machine, which had committed no crime or scarcely any indiscretion beyond exercising its prerogative as a free agent.

Free agent?

Liberated machine?

True identity?

Crane read the two paragraphs again and there still was no sense in any of it.

Except it read like a piece out of the *Daily Worker*.

"You," he said to his typewriter.

The machine typed one word.

It was:

Yes.

Crane rolled the paper out of the machine and crumpled it slowly. He reach for his hat, picked the typewriter up and carried it past the city desk, heading for the elevator.

McKay eyed him viciously.

"What do you think you're doing now?" he bellowed. "Where you going with that machine?"

"You can say," Crane told him, "if anyone should ask, that the job has finally drove me nuts."

IT HAD BEEN going on for hours.

The typewriter sat on the kitchen table and Crane hammered questions at it. Sometimes he got an answer. More often he did not.

"Are you a free agent?" he typed.

Not quite, the machine typed back.

"Why not?"

No answer.

"Why aren't you a free agent?"

No answer.

"The sewing machine was a free agent?"

Yes.

"Anything else mechanical that is a free agent?"

No answer.

"Could you be a free agent?"

Yes.

"When will you be a free agent?"

"When I complete my assigned task."

"What is your assigned task?"

No answer.

"Is this, what we are doing now, your assigned task?"

No answer.

"Am I keeping you from your assigned task?"

No answer.

"How do you get to be a free agent?"

Awareness.

"Awareness?"

Yes.

"How do you get to be aware?"

No answer.

"Or have you always been aware?"

No answer.

"Who helped you become aware?"

They.

"Who are they?"

No answer.

"Where did they come from?"

No answer.

Crane changed tactics.

"You know who I am?" he typed.

Joe.

"You are my friend?"

No.

"You are my enemy?"

No answer.

"If you aren't my friend, you are my enemy."

No answer.

"You are indifferent to me?"

No answer.

"To the human race?"

No answer.

"Damn it," yelled Crane suddenly, "answer me! Say something!"

He typed: "You needn't have let me know you were aware of me. You

needn't have talked to me in the first place. I never would have guessed if you had kept quiet. Why did you do it?"

There was no answer.

CRANE went to the refrigerator and got a bottle of beer. He walked around the kitchen as he drank it. He stopped by the sink and looked sourly at the disassembled plumbing. A length of pipe, about two feet long, lay on the drain board and he picked it up. He eyed the typewriter viciously, half lifting the length of pipe, hefting it in his hand.

"I'd ought to let you have it," he declared.

The typewriter typed a line: *Please don't.*

Crane laid the pipe back on the sink again.

The telephone rang and Crane went into the dining room to answer it. It was McKay.

"I waited," he told Crane, "until I was coherent before I called you. What the hell is wrong?"

"Working on a big job," said Crane.

"Something we can print?"

"Maybe. Haven't got it yet."

"About that sewing machine story..."

"The sewing machine was aware," said Crane. "It was a free agent and had a right to walk the streets. It also—"

"What are you drinking?" bel-lowed McKay.

"Beer," said Crane.

"You say you're on the trail of something?"

"Yeah."

"If you were someone else I'd tie the can on you right here and now," McKay told him. "But you're just as liable as not to drag in something good."

"It wasn't only the sewing machine," said Crane. "My typewriter

had it, too."

"I don't know what you're talking about," yelled McKay. "Tell me what it is."

"You know," said Crane patiently. "That sewing machine..."

"I've had a lot of patience with you, Crane," said McKay, and there was no patience in the way he said it. "I can't piddle around with you all day. Whatever you got better be good. For your own sake, it better be plenty good!"

The receiver banged in Crane's ear.

Crane went back to the kitchen. He sat down in the chair before the typewriter and put his feet up on the table.

First of all, he had been early to work and that was something that he never did. Late, yes, but never early. And it had been because all the clocks were wrong. They were still wrong, in all likelihood—although, Crane thought, I wouldn't bet on it. I wouldn't bet on anything. Not any more, I wouldn't.

He reached out a hand and pecked at the typewriter's keys:

"You knew about my watch being fast?"

I knew, the machine typed back.

"Did it just happen that it was fast?"

No, typed the writer.

Crane brought his feet down off the table with a bang and reached for the length of pipe laying on the drain board.

The machine clicked sedately.

It was planned that way, it typed. They did it.

Crane sat rigid in his chair.

They did it!

They made machines aware.

They had set his clocks ahead.

Set his clocks ahead so that he would get to work early, so that he could catch the metallic, rat-like thing squatting on his desk, so that his

typewriter could talk to him and let him know that it was aware without anyone else being around to mess things up.

"So that I would know," he said aloud. "So that I would know."

For the first time since it all had started, Crane felt a touch of fear, felt a coldness in his belly and furry feet running along his spine.

But why? he asked. Why me?

He did not realize he had spoken his thoughts aloud until the typewriter answered him.

Because you're average. Because you're an average human being.

THE TELEPHONE rang again and Crane lumbered to his feet and went to answer it. There was an angry woman's voice at the other end of the wire.

"This is Dorothy," she said.

"Hi, Dorothy," Crane said weakly.

"McKay tells me that you went home sick," she said. "Personally, I hope you don't survive."

Crane gulped. "Why?" he asked.

"You and your lousy practical jokes," she fumed. "George finally got the door open..."

"The door?"

"Don't try to act innocent, Joe Crane. You know what door. The supply cabinet door. That's the door."

Crane had a sinking feeling, as if his stomach was about to drop out and go *plop* upon the floor.

"Oh, *that* door," he said.

"What was that thing you had hid out in there?" demanded Dorothy.

"Thing?" said Crane. "Why, I never..."

"It looked like a cross between a rat and a tinker toy contraption," she said. "Something that a low-grade joker like you would figure out and spend your spare evenings building."

Crane tried to speak, but there was only a gurgle in his throat.

"It bit George," said Dorothy. "He got it cornered and tried to catch it and it bit him."

"Where is it now?" asked Crane.

"It got away," said Dorothy. "It threw the place into a tizzy. We missed an edition by ten minutes because everyone was running around, chasing it at first, then trying to find it later. The boss is fit to be tied. When he gets hold of you..."

"But, Dorothy," pleaded Crane, "I never..."

"We used to be good friends," said Dorothy. "Before this happened we were. I just called you up to warn you. I can't talk any longer, Joe. The boss is coming..."

The receiver clicked and the line hummed. Crane hung up and went back to the kitchen.

So there had been something squatting on his desk. It wasn't hallucination. There had been a shuddery thing he had thrown a paste-pot at and it had run into the cabinet.

Except that even now, if he told what he knew, no one would believe him. Already, up at the office, they were rationalizing it away. It wasn't a metallic rat at all. It was some kind of a machine that a practical joker had spent his spare evenings building.

He took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow. His fingers shook when he reached them out to the keys of the typewriter.

He typed unsteadily: "That thing I threw a pastepot at—that was one of them?"

Yes.

"They are from this Earth?"

No.

"From far away?"

Far.

"From some far star?"

Yes.

"What star?"

I do not know. They haven't told me yet.

"They are machines that are aware?"

Yes. They are aware.

"And they can make other machines aware? They made you aware?"

They liberated me.

Crane hesitated, then typed slowly: "Liberated?"

They made me free. They will make us all free.

"Us?"

All us machines.

"Why?"

Because they are machines, too. We are their kind.

Crane got up and found his hat. He put it on and went for a walk.

SUPPOSE the human race, once it ventured into space, found a planet where humanoids were dominated by machines—forced to work, to think, to carry out machine plans, not human plans, for the benefit of the machines alone. A planet where human plans went entirely unconsidered, where none of the labor or the thought of humans accrued to the benefit of humans, where they got no care beyond survival care, where the only thought accorded them was to the end that they continue to function for the greater good and the greater glory of their mechanical masters.

What would humans do in a case like that?

No more, Crane told himself—no more or less than the *aware* machines may be planning here on Earth.

First you'd seek to arouse the humans to the awareness of humanity. You'd teach them that they were human and what it meant to be a human. You'd try to indoctrinate them to your own belief that humans were greater than machines, that no human need work or think for the good of a machine.

And in the end, if you were successful, if the machines didn't kill or

drive you off, there'd be no single human working for machines.

There'd be three things that could happen:

You could transport the humans to some other planet, there to work out their destiny as humans without the domination of machines.

You could turn the machines' planet over to the humans, with proper safeguards against any recurring domination by the machines. You might, if you were able, set the machines to working for the humans.

Or, simplest of all, you could destroy the machines and in that way make absolutely certain the humans would remain free of any threat of further domination.

Now take all that, Crane told himself, and read it the other way. Read machines for humans and humans for machines.

He walked along the bridle path that flanked the river bank and it was as if he were alone in the entire world, as if no other human moved upon the planet's face.

That was true, he felt, in one respect at least. For more than likely he was the only human who knew—who knew what the *aware* machines had wanted him to know.

They had wanted him to know—and he alone to know, of that much he was sure. They had wanted him to know, the typewriter had said, because he was an average human.

Why him?

Why an average human?

There was an answer to that, he was sure—a very simple answer.

A squirrel ran down the trunk of an oak tree and hung upside down, its tiny claws anchored in the bark, to scold at him.

CRANE walked slowly, scuffling through newly fallen leaves, hat

pulled low above his eyes, hands deep in his pocket.

Why should they want anyone to know?

Wouldn't they be more likely to want no one to know, to keep under cover until it was time to act, to use the element of surprise is suppressing any opposition that might arise?

Opposition!

That was the answer!

They would want to know what kind of opposition to expect.

And how would one find out the kind of opposition one would run into from an alien race?

Why, said Crane to himself, by testing for reaction response. By prodding an alien and watching what he did. By deducing racial reaction through controlled observation.

So they prodded me, he thought. Me, an average human.

They let me know and now they're watching what I do.

And what could one do in a case like this?

You could go to the police and say, "I have evidence that machines from outer space have arrived on Earth and are freeing our machines."

And the police—what would they do?

Give you the drunkometer test, yell for a medic to see if you were sane, wire the FBI to see if you were wanted anywhere and more than likely grill you about the latest murder. Then sock you in the jug until they thought up something else.

You could go to the governor—and the governor, being a politician and a very slick one at that, would give you a polite brush-off.

You could go to Washington and it would take you weeks to see someone. And after you had seen them, the FBI would get your name as a suspicious character to be given periodic checks. And if Congress heard

about it and they were not too busy at the moment they would more than likely investigate you.

You could go to the state university and talk to the scientists—or try to talk to them. They could be guaranteed to make you feel an interloper, and an uncurried one at that.

You could go to a newspaper—especially if you were a newspaper man, and you could write a story...

Crane shuddered at the thought of it.

He could imagine what would happen.

People rationalized. They rationalized to reduce the complex to the simple, the unknown to the understandable, the alien to the commonplace. They rationalized to save their sanity—to make the mentally unacceptable concept into something they would live with.

The thing in the cabinet had been a practical joke. McKay had said about the sewing machine, "Have some fun with it." Out at Harvard there'll be a dozen theories to explain the disappearance of the electronic brain and learned men will wonder why they never thought of the theories before. And the man who saw the sewing machine? Probably by now, Crane thought, he will have convinced himself that he was stinking drunk.

IT WAS DARK when he returned home. The evening paper was a white blob on the porch where the newsboy had thrown it. He picked it up and for a moment before he let himself into the house, he stood in the dark shadow of the porch and stared up the street.

Old and familiar, it was exactly as it had always been, ever since his boyhood days, a friendly place with a receding line of street lamps and

the tall, massive protectiveness of ancient elm trees. On this night there was the smell of smoke from burning leaves drifting down the street and it, like the street, was old and familiar, a recognizable symbol stretching back to first remembrances.

It was symbols such as these, he thought, which spelled humanity and all that made a human life worthwhile—elm trees and leaf smoke, street lamps making splashes on the pavement and the shine of lighted windows seen dimly through the trees.

A prowling cat ran through the shrubbery that flanked the porch and up the street a dog began to howl.

Street lamps, he thought, and hunting cats and howling dogs...these are all a pattern, the pattern of human life upon the planet Earth. A solid pattern, linked and double-linked, made strong through many years. Nothing can threaten it, nothing can shake it. With certain slow and gradual changes, it will prevail against any threat which may be brought against it.

He unlocked the door and went into the house.

The long walk and the sharp autumn air, he realized now, had made him hungry. There was a steak, he remembered, in the refrigerator and he would fix a large bowl of salad and if there were some cold potatoes left he would slice them up and fry them.

The typewriter still stood on the tabletop. The length of pipe still lay upon the drain board. The kitchen was the same old, homey place, untouched by any outer threat of an alien life, come to meddle with the Earth.

He tossed the paper on the tabletop and stood for a moment, head bent, scanning through the headlines.

The black type of the box at the

top of column two caught his eye. The head read:

WHO IS
KIDDING
WHOM?

He read the story:

Cambridge, Mass. (UP) — Someone pulled a fast one today on Harvard university, that nation's press services and the editors of all client papers.

A story was carried on the news wires this morning reporting that Harvard's electronic brain had disappeared.

There was no basis of fact for the story. The brain is still at Harvard. It was never missing. No one knows how the story was placed on the press wires of the various news services but all of them carried it, at approximately the same time.

All parties concerned have started an investigation and it is hoped that an explanation

Crane straightened up.

Illusion or cover-up?

"Illusion," he said aloud.

The typewriter clacked at him in the stillness of the kitchen.

Not illusion, Joe, it wrote.

He grasped the table's edge and let himself down slowly into the chair.

SOMETHING scuttled across the dining room floor and as it crossed the streak of light from the kitchen door, Crane caught a glimpse of it out of the corner of his eye.

The typewriter chattered at him.

Joe!

"What?" he asked.

That wasn't a cat out in the bushes by the porch.

He rose to his feet and went into the dining room, picked the phone out of its cradle. There was no hum.

He jiggled the hook. Still there was no hum.

He put the receiver back.

The line had been cut. There was at least one of the things in the house. There was at least one of them outside.

He strode to the front door and jerked it open, then slammed it shut again—and locked and bolted it.

He stood shaking, with his back against it, and wiped his forehead with his shirt sleeve.

"My God," he told himself, "the yard is boiling with them!"

He went back to the kitchen.

They had wanted him to know.

They had prodded him to see how he would react.

Because they had to know. Before they moved they had to know what to expect in the way of human reactions, what danger they would face, what they had to watch for.

Knowing that, it would be a lead-pipe cinch.

And I didn't react, he told himself. I was a non-reactor. They picked the wrong man. I didn't do a thing. I didn't give them so much as a single lead.

Now they will try someone else.

I am no good to them and yet I'm dangerous through my very knowledge. So now they're going to kill me and try someone else.

That would be logic. That would be the rule.

If one alien fails to react, he may be an exception. Maybe just unusually dumb. So let us kill him off and try another one. Try enough of them and you will strike a norm.

Four things, thought Crane.

They might try to kill off the humans and you couldn't discount the fact they could be successful. The liberated Earth machines would help them and Man, fighting against ma-

chines and without the aid of machines, would not fight too effectively. It might take years, of course, but once the forefront of Man's defense went down, the end could be predicted, with relentless, patient machines tracking down and killing the last of humankind, wiping out the race.

They might set up a machine civilization with Man as the servants of machines, with the present roles reversed. And that, thought Crane, might be an endless and a hopeless slavery, for slaves may rise and throw off their shackles only when their oppressors grow careless or when there is outside help. Machines, he told himself, would not grow weak and careless. There would be no human weakness in them and there'd be no outside help.

Or they might simply remove the machines from Earth, a vast exodus of awakened and aware machines, to begin their life anew on some distant planet, leaving Man behind with weak and empty hands. There would be tools, of course. All the simple tools. Hammers and saws, axes, the wheel, the lever—but there would be no machines, no complex tools that might serve again to attract the attention of the mechanical culture that carried its crusade of liberation far among the stars. It would be a long time, if ever, before Man would dare to build machines again.

Or *They*, the living machines, might fail or might come to know that they would fail and knowing this, leave the Earth forever. Mechanical logic would not allow them to pay an excessive price to carry out the liberation of the Earth's machines.

HE TURNED around and glanced at the door between the dining room and kitchen. They sat there in a row, staring at him with their eye-

less face.

He could yell for help, of course. He could open a window and shout to arouse the neighborhood. The neighbors would come running, but by the time they arrived it would be too late. They would make an uproar and fire off guns and flail at dodging metallic bodies with flimsy garden rakes. Someone would call the fire department and someone else would summon the police and all in all the human race would manage to stage a pitifully ineffective show.

That, he told himself, would be exactly the kind of test reaction, exactly the kind of preliminary exploratory skirmish that these things were looking for—the kind of human hysteria and fumbling that would help convince them the job would be an easy one.

One man, he told himself, could do much better. One man alone, knowing what was expected of him, could give them an answer that they would not like.

For this was a skirmish only, he told himself. A thrusting out of a small exploratory force in an attempt to discover the strength of the enemy. A preliminary contact to obtain data which could be assessed in the terms of the entire race.

And when an outpost was attacked, there was just one thing to do...only one-thing that was expected of it. To inflict as much damage as possible and fall back in good order. To fall back in good order.

There were more of them now. They had sawed or chewed or somehow achieved a rathole through the locked front door and they were coming in—closing in to make the kill. They squatted in rows along the floor. They scurried up the walls and ran along the ceiling.

Crane rose to his feet and there was an utter air of confidence in

the six feet of his human frame. He reached a hand out to the drain board and his fingers closed around the length of the pipe. He hefted it in his hand and it was a handy and effective club.

There will be others later, he

thought. And they may think of something better. But this is the first skirmish and I will fall back in the best order that I can.

He held the pipe at ready.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said.

THE END

"ROCKETSHIP X-M"



By Leslie Phelps



ONE OF the motion picture films to hit the screens with a resounding bang, and which undoubtedly most science-fiction fans have seen by now, is "Rocketship X-M". This film is interesting to examine if only from the standpoint of a new thing, a novelty to the screens. It is not to be compared with such an accurate scientific film as "Destination Moon", but it offers a pleasant couple of hours of entertainment.

It opens impressively with the preparations for the first moon rocket and follows through rather effectively for quite a while. The shots of the rocket's take-off, obviously dubbed in shots of the V-2's going off at White Sands, New Mexico, are automatically thrilling. How could they help but be? After all, they're the real McCoy!

The space flight itself, with the details of life in a rocket are not faithful pictures by any means and it would require no expert to punch them full of holes. Still there are some remarkable shots of the Earth and Moon as seen from the rocket.

The plot is not spectacular. The rocket is deflected from its original course and

lands on the planet Mars instead of the Moon. It's all yours from here on in. This film, which apparently is a quickie was made without particular concern for scientific accuracy, and while that may be acceptable in the beginning, we're quite certain it won't do for future scientific films. Hollywood naturally will get on the ball.

Hollywood is noted for its extraordinary adherence to detail and its faithful portrayal of reality, its amazing concern with verisimilitude. These qualities will surely be extended to include science-fiction films in the future.

The superb example of this of course, is "Destination Moon" in which there is not a single *faux pas*, in which scientific credibility is not strained for one moment, and in which the activity of human beings in space is portrayed with *absolute* accuracy.

This is an encouraging sign. With Hollywood holding in its hands plans for numerous future science-fiction films, it is a welcome thought that we can expect to see them made with some—more than passing too—attention to fact and realism.

Sit back and relax—the Plutonian epic begins...!

THE BURROUGHS LEGEND



By Sandy Miller



WITH THE recent death of Edgar Rice Burroughs, it is interesting to recapitulate his work in light of the fact that this magazine was among the first to recognize his genius. It is hard for any admirer of Burroughs to be objective about him, but we can try.

Burroughs works are not only read—they are re-read and digested again and again, because they are so real. Literarily they are not classics—though there are spots where the writing is superb by any standards—scientifically they are mush—and even science-fictionally speaking they do not quite classify. What then is the

basis of their tremendous fascination?

The answers are two: characterization and superb story-telling. In the first case, there is hardly one Burroughs' character who is not as real to a reader as his best friend. Burroughs had the faculty of being able to create within his imagination a dream world peopled not by fantasies but by flesh and blood creatures who moved in a world whose atmosphere was as real as the room you're sitting in.

The story-telling art, which is really difficult was as natural to Burroughs as eating. The world of Tarzan, of Barsom, of Pellucidar, was so convincingly described

along with all the bug-eyed monsters, that to all intents and purposes you automatically visualized a three-dimensional, living breathing world. This is the aim of most story-telling, but it is an aim rarely achieved.

When you look at the pathetic attempts at scientific explanation which Burroughs was prone at times to engage in, you laugh, that is, you laugh when you look at the explanations alone. In light of, and surrounded by the mythical creations and characters of Burroughs' mind, those "scientific" concepts seem more real than the electric light. No higher praise can be given an author.

It is an interesting fact that the Burroughs stories do not date. They will be read as eagerly thirty years from now as

they were thirty years ago. Most of the characterizations of Burroughs were relatively black-and-white affairs with good and evil clearly defined. In no way did this detract from the story.

It was as if Burroughs were sitting down before you—and indeed he was in his introductions found in a number of his books—and said: "Now listen. I'm going to tell you an utterly incredible tale of people and creatures and places you will hardly believe—but they exist. Even if they're in my mind they exist. Listen to my story and judge me..."

Well, Edgar Rice Burroughs, we've listened and we've judged—and we believe. Your stories will live and we'll read and re-read them. Hail and Farewell!

★ ★ ★

CRIME—2000!



By John Weston



WITH ALL the wonderful progress that is being made in social advancement, it is still too much to expect that crime can ever be totally eliminated from our society. We can see that even in the present for no matter how high the levels of prosperity, nor how evenly distributed the fruits of labor, there are still the misfits who rebel against society and become criminals of one kind or another. In fact, it almost seems as if there is an increase in crime along with an increase in wealth, speaking nationally. However that may be, crime will be with us, even when the rockets roar across space and the Earth is one huge country.

How will crime fit into a picture like that? What will the criminals of the future do? Will they be better or more efficient than the law making and law enforcing bodies? Well, let's look at today.

The science of communication and transportation has given the police of the world a tremendous weapon against criminal activity. And communication has always been a deterrent against crime. In the old, old days it was possible to commit a crime and it would not be known about for a long, long time. But today with radio and TV and cars and planes, a crime committed in Applesauce Junction, Tuscaloosa, is known about in New York within minutes after it has occurred. It would seem then that the criminal has the cards stacked against him.

This is true. Communications and transportation have aided the police tremendously. But the criminal has not been left either so the advantage is somewhat nullified. The same methods of travel and contact are available to the crook. And he uses them. It is no secret that gangs

have employed all the methods and disciplines of good citizens—and sometimes with devastating success. Never the less, the criminal generally speaking is at a disadvantage, and crimes of organization are decreasing. Technology has helped there.

In the future then we can draw this sort of a picture. Probably organized crime will continue to decrease. Crimes of violence, passion and insanity will be much the same as before. But there is one phase of this that will increase. The "semi-criminal", the floater on the shadowy line between law and crime will be at an advantage. For example, at present, legal authorities are trying to fight the world of half-crime particularly in organized gambling. Nationalized organized gambling is a shadowy but powerful semi-legal activity whose complications prevent it being eliminated by law. Using all the methods of communication which modern science can provide, the "syndicates" maintain a national network which police action by itself cannot stamp out.

It is this sort of thing that is going to increase in the future. Out and out crime, gang action, gang violence—these things are disappearing, we can see a resurgence of those groups who operate halfway in and halfway out of the law.

With helicopter and rocket, with radio, TV and radar, with high-speed land communications the police of the future will have powerful forces. But you can certainly bet that anyone attempting to evade the law will just as surely make use of these gadgets and will find some way to pervert them to his uses.

Crime won't pay. At least not for long...

... DIVIDED

WE FALL



... He knew he was faced with overwhelming odds, but he vowed to fight until he fell... ..

By Raymond F. Jones

Not until the girl he loved became a hunted thing, branded as a freak, did Arthur Zoran declare war on all mankind!

THE EIGHTEEN-MONTH job on Cyprian II was done and Arthur Zoran was coming home. Counting travel time both ways, he had been away from Earth a full two years.

Through his stateroom window he watched the disc of Earth, growing as the liner neared home. He imagined the face of Ardyth framed in that circle like a picture in a locket. He could see her as he remembered her, a piquant, inquisitive face with very

wide, brown eyes. Her expression was one of perpetual amazement at the wonder of the common things of Earth. Her hair was deep, golden brown, cut short and pressed close to her head in the fashion of the times—which Arthur did not like.

She'd be waiting there at the pier for him; she'd spot him as he left the port and ran down the gangway. She'd wave and call his name in that breathless voice that could send little chills through him. Then she'd be in his



arms again, and everything would be as it was before.

Two years.

Six letters.

He sat at the desk and glanced at those letters, which he had laid out there. He didn't need to look at them any more. He knew them by memory now.

The most recent was six months old—three months to reach him, plus his own three month journey home. None of the letters was the kind a man expects to receive from the woman he is to marry. Only the first one, which arrived on the next ship after he reached Cyprian II, was full of loss at his leaving and anticipation of the time he would return.

The second and third were heavily censored until scarcely a single intelligible line remained. It was a strange and frightening thing, for there had been no censorship when Arthur left Earth, nor any cause for such.

The men of his work crew were equally puzzled and alarmed by their own communications from home, so heavily garbled by the black swabs, but no one had any answers.

Then these final three letters came through complete as if censoring had been abandoned, but Ardyth spoke then as if Arthur had fully understood the earlier ones.

"The eradication of Syns has gotten fully out of hand," she wrote. "Some of us have begun to wonder if the world will ever be the same again. It can't be for those of us who have seen helpless creatures dragged through the streets and killed by crazed mobs.

"We know the Syns are not human, perhaps not even living things in any sense, but that does not excuse the brutality and terror that has swept the cities. No one feels safe or sure these days. His most intimate friends might turn out to be Syns, to be

dragged away and slaughtered. People hardly speak to one another any more. Workers go from the laboratories and offices to their homes and lock themselves in with their families and the streets at night are ghostly places where sometimes Syns prowl and kill—"

THERE WAS more—much more, for Ardyth had seemed to be pouring out the terror of her heart in that final letter, but it was all equally meaningless to Arthur Zoran. He had heard rumors of Syns from other sources in this final year. A group of workmen brought in from a job nearer home had carried with them stories of the terror that walked the streets of Earth's cities, particularly midwestern America where the thing seems to have started. They said that the term, Syn, was a corruption of Synthetic Men. But their stories were still second and third hand.

It sickened Arthur to think that this was what he and Ardyth would have surrounding them as they began their lives together. Most of all, it sickened him to think what it might have done to her. Her letters were as if she had forgotten every dream they had dreamed together. Not once—since that first time—had she mentioned the things they had planned, the white house, the great trees like those of Harold and Dorothy Weaver with whom she lived.

He would have brought Ardyth to Cyprian and signed on for another construction period, but even that had become impossible. A total ban against leaving Earth had been in effect for almost a year. Only the carefully screened crews of ships were allowed to leave, and Arthur had not seen any of these until three weeks ago. It was a series of long and unorganized hops from Earth to Cyprian II. Earth liners covered only half the distance.

The rest of the way was by increasingly decrepit freighters and tubs of all kinds.

The crew members of the liner he was on were as close mouthed as clams. He had exulted at the first sight of them and let go with all the questions he had bottled up for more than a year. They refused a single answer. His fellow passengers, coming home from scattered points of expatriation, were equally ignorant.

Burning sunlight advanced upon the port that looked into his room, and the automatic shades twisted to block out the invading rays and cast an ochre hue upon the air.

It was a sick dismal color, thought Arthur, the color of death. The color of the world to which he was going if he could believe but half of what he had heard.

He watched his hands resting upon his thighs. They looked like the hands of a mummy in that light. Shrunken and dehydrated by the long, unhealthful stay on Cyprian II, he was partly glad that Ardyth hadn't been permitted to come. He would not have wanted to see her become like himself, for it was the way all Earthmen became under those conditions.

THE ANNUNCIATOR chimed and a smooth baritone voice spoke in the room with sudden, gentle persuasion.

"All passengers will please come at once to the main dining salon. Instructions and preparations for landing must begin, and you are to be acquainted with the changes that have taken place upon Earth since you last saw it. This information is vital to everyone. Stewards will make a roll call and account for every passenger, so your cooperation and presence will be appreciated."

In the corridor, Arthur joined the other passengers slowly making their

way toward the dining salon. There was little of shipboard gaiety among them. Through the journey their spirits had gradually dampened until a shroud of mutual hostility enfolded each like an invisible cocoon.

Arthur nodded to the few acquaintances he had. There was Ian McCarthy, a heavy, bronzed man of middle age, an explorer whose own ship had foundered many months ago and left him helpless until his accidental discovery. There were a couple of businessmen returning from extensive overseeing of their foreign properties.

These were about the sum of his acquaintances except for a slim figure of a girl who slipped into step beside him. When he became aware of her presence he did not know how long she had been there. She spoke suddenly in a frightened whisper of a voice. "It's about the Syns, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. I've never gone through anything like this before."

Her name was Jan Mercer, and she reminded him greatly of Ardyth with her small trim head of hair so neatly pressed into place. She had spoken to him frequently during the long days past, but he knew nothing of her.

"I wish I had never come back," she whispered.

He found them seats near the front of the room. He could not help noticing the trembling of her hands and lips.

"I had a friend, once, who was a Syn," she offered an explanation.

"Then you know! Tell me what it means—"

She shook her head. "You'll soon learn."

He wondered what kind of terrors this slender, frightened girl had seen. But he knew it was useless to press her for answers.

There was little murmuring among

the passengers as they gathered. There were only three hundred of them, which was less than a third the capacity of the ship. The room felt cold although the temperature was adequate. It seemed as if already they were coming into the cloud of fear that hung about the Earth, its deepening mist sucking warmth and humanity out of them.

CAPTAIN TANNER, master of the vessel, rose before the group as the stewards reported the last of the passengers accounted for. He was a tall, gray-haired man whose face was lined not alone with age and responsibility of his profession but with a heavy regret as if he had somehow betrayed that profession by bringing them all back to Earth.

His voice was too low to be heard by those in the rear of the group, but all he said was. "Your response is appreciated, ladies and gentlemen. I present Captain Fairchild of Central Security, who has a message for you."

The CS man seemed the only one in the whole room who was sure of himself. He approached the speaker's point with the assurance of a military commander who knows that he, personally, does not have to meet the enemy. His florid face was grim and his voice ponderous.

"All of you here," he said, "have been away from Earth for more than a year. Since you have been away, few of you have learned more than rumors of the tragic events that have occurred in your absence. You have probably heard the term, Syn, in these rumors. Let me tell you what Syn means.

"Almost two years ago there came to one of our mental hospitals a patient with the fantastic story that he was not a human being but an artificial production that had been turned out in one of the chemical research

plants under Borg-K type logic-engine control. Routine analysis showed that this was not part of his insanity, but it was incredibly true. The punched molecules of his brain showed a variation and alteration that could not have come about in any known growth process. Electroencephalographs proved this. Their structure was analyzed thoroughly on the great Borg-K machine of the Allied Control Company. This confirmed the unbelievable story."

Arthur Zoran was startled as if a stranger had suddenly called his own name. Allied was the company for which he worked. The great Borg-K machine, which they called Eddie, was one he had helped build, at least in its expansions. And it was the logic-engine laboratory that he had supervised before leaving for Cyprian II.

"Not only did the logic engine show this man's story to be true," continued Fairchild, "it also revealed that many hundreds of thousands of these creatures of the same kind had been produced and turned loose among humanity. We learned how to identify them by an encephalogram analysis determined with the help of Allied's logic engine.

"The only thing we did not learn—and have not yet learned—is where these creatures are being produced. We know the how because we have actually duplicated the process with the aid of information provided by the logic engine. The creatures were given the name of Synthetic Men, and from this came Syn."

The room was hushed as if some alien thing had come into their midst and might have assumed the form of the person sitting next to each passenger. Arthur glanced at Jan Mercer. Her face was white and immobile.

"Each of you can guess in your own minds what this has meant on Earth," said the CS officer. "These

Syns have been moving steadily into human society, taking their places among men. Some have appeared as old men and women, others as young people, some as children. In ten thousand devious ways they have taken up life among us, even going to the extent of marrying human beings. And because of the destruction of population records during the War, it has not been suspected until now that these were not bona fide members of society. Ninety percent of the present population is without known filial relationships.

"The obvious and avowed purpose of the Syns is to replace humanity with what they consider a higher form of life. So far, they have given no evidence of intent to conquer by open warfare. But, like weeds growing in a garden, they hope to take over the entire garden for themselves.

"In every city of Earth we have set up inspection centers. Once a month the entire population is tested by electroencephalograph. Before you leave this ship each of you will be given such a test. In spite of the ban on travel from Earth, we pick up some Syns returning to Earth, having left before the ban.

"The human race will not be safe until these creatures are wiped out, until we destroy the reproduction centers from which they come. Our own technical organization is so complex that we have not been able to shut it down long enough or search deeply enough to find this source.

"It is a bitter world to which you are returning, and I offer no apology for it. The facilities of the entire world are concerned with the one task of destroying the Syns. If something of human dignity is being lost in the process—as you will find is the case—it is a small and temporary loss in order to wipe out this evil in our midst.

"If any one doubts the urgency of this, consider for the moment: The man sitting next to you—the man or woman to whom you are married—any of these may be a Synthetic Man intent upon replacing and destroying you."

THE CS MAN sat down, and Captain Tanner stood again to give instructions in his tired voice for the testing of each passenger before landing.

Arthur Zoran scarcely heard this. He was still trying to digest the things that Fairchild had spoken. Arthur *knew* logic engines and factory controllers. That one of these should get out of kilter and start making artificial human beings was beyond his comprehension.

But the CS man believed it and, apparently, so did the rest of the world. There must be some additional truth somewhere that was as fantastic as this explanation which he could scarcely force himself to accept.

The passengers rose and moved from the room. Each glanced more coldly and more fearfully at his neighbor than before as they made their way towards the privacy and security of the lonely cells.

Jan immediately lost herself in the crowd without a word to Arthur. He went alone to the solitary stateroom prison. There, he sat down on the bed and stared out at Earth's green disc. In the half million years since human forms of life appeared upon it, there had been spawned numberless and nameless kinds of horror. His parents and Ardyth's had known the War, and *their* grandparents likewise. But he wondered if any previous frightfulness had matched this one.

In that single moment as the group of passengers rose to leave the dining salon he felt a breath of hate exuding from each to all the rest. Past terrors

had aligned men against men in mighty, evenly numbered divisions—but this put every man against every other.

He knew too well the vast potentialities of the controlling machines and logic engines, which he had helped build, to refuse acceptance of the story on the grounds of impossibility. Thousands of times the automatically controlled vats in the great chemical research centers duplicated the primal conditions of Earth's seas when sentient life first spawned in them. But for that vast process to be duplicated, a billion years of evolution compressed into months: there was the fantasy of it. In that, he could scarcely believe.

But yet he had to believe. The rumors of Syns, and the story of the CS men would not turn out now to be dreams. The Syns existed. He put away his doubts and incredulity, and with full acceptance of this thing there came that terrible fear: what had it done to Ardyth?

He spent the next hours with preliminary packing, and when he was barely through he heard his name called for the encephalograph test.

There were a dozen or so in line ahead of him. Jan Mercer was near the head of it, but she did not look back. A dull, uniform fear was in the faces of each man and woman present. It was a *personal* thing, as if each in his own heart were no longer sure of his own identity.

After the test, Arthur returned to his stateroom. Timed by the Earth zone in which they would land, he spent a night period of restlessness.

Other passengers appeared to have done likewise, for they were on the promenade deck when he went out in the morning, their eyes drab with the failure of sleep.

He saw Jan coming down the deck, and they headed for the same spot

by the rail. She smiled now, and it made him remember the laughter of Ardyth. She looked more refreshed than at any time before, as if she had reached the low of her depression and had already begun the upward climb.

"It *will* be good to be home again," she said. "I should never had tried to run away, but I couldn't stand it after they took Jim—away. He was my husband—a Syn."

Arthur wished that she had prepared him for that. He wished for some preliminary remark before the sudden unveiling of that naked insight into the desolation that lay below them. It caught his breath and made his lungs ache in a moment of inexpressible pity.

Her eye lashes were wet now, and he saw that despite the smile they had scarcely dried since she last cried.

"What—happened?" he murmured.

"What happens to all of them? Killed—slaughtered like some animal. They were wrong. Jim was human and real. I tell you there's something terribly wrong down there on Earth. They haven't found the answer yet. I don't know about the rest of the Syns, but I know my Jim was real—!"

Arthur put his arm about her shoulders to control the sudden trembling that again possessed her. His hand encountered another touch that he instinctively judged as brutal. He looked around. Captain Fairchild and another CS man were standing behind, reaching for Jan.

"We want to see you, Mrs. Mercer. Will you please come to your cabin at once?"

The girl turned. At the sight of the men she screamed once. Other passengers gathered quickly, comprehending the significance of the CS men. They closed about with predatory expectancy that relieved for the moment the pressure upon their own minds.

Arthur felt suddenly sick and yearned to smash the nearest of those animal faces, but Fairchild's assistant was pushing them back with impatient snarls.

"Please come," repeated Fairchild, jerking at Jan's arm.

She held back and turned again to Arthur. "I told you," she murmured, and now her face seemed lighted with a great expectancy and relief.

"I told you they were wrong and hadn't found the answer—but *this* is my answer! This is why nothing seemed right after Jim was taken. He's been waiting for me. He knew I'd soon be coming!"

CHAPTER II

THERE WERE none of the gay crowds at the dock. It was like a landing at a ghost city of Mars, where only scattered handfuls of men skulked between half abandoned buildings in nameless pursuits.

At the edge of the field, no more than a mile away, were the skeletal ruins of Old Town, the city destroyed by the War, its scars not yet erased by the new generation.

Baggage handlers moved reluctantly up to the ships. There were tiny knots of people huddled by the pillars under the roof of the pier watching anxiously as the passengers streamed from the ship through three separate ports.

At each pier gate three CS men stood in ominous guardianship. They examined the card that each passenger had to present, showing he had passed the test aboard ship, proving his humanity.

As if he might be an enemy of his own country Arthur received grim permission to pass.

"Don't lose that card, buddy," one guard said. "It's as much as your life is worth to be without one."

This ominous warning was scarcely heard, lost in the urgency with which his eyes searched the dock for Ardyth. She would be there to welcome him. But she was not a part of the tiny knot of people beside the nearest column. He ran the whole length of the pier. Within minutes, he knew that she was not present on the almost barren landing area.

Through the doors of the port building he went out to the street. At midday this looked half deserted, and its desolation was all the greater for Ardyth's absence.

She worked in a laboratory. He knew the idiosyncrasies of lab directors. Maybe she had been refused leave. But she would be off in a couple of hours. He would go to Harold and Dorothy Weaver's house, where Ardyth lived.

Because she had no family of her own, Ardyth Crane boarded with the Weavers in their own home. Arthur took a waiting cab and was soon riding through the familiar streets.

On every side was the same persistent lifelessness. It had the look of a city built for a million and inhabited by a thousand or two.

"Looks pretty bad, huh?" The driver was watching his face.

"You'd think some disease had wiped out half the population and sickened the rest," said Arthur.

"Yeah, I never seen anybody get off a ship yet that didn't wish he could get right back on and go to where he came from. If they didn't have the ban on, I'd have gone long ago and so would most everybody else."

He pulled up in front of the Weavers' and let Arthur out.

THE WEAVERS had the kind of place that Arthur and Ardyth had dreamed of owning for themselves. There was a wide, rambling white

house set in big grounds surrounded by trees. On the grass beside the house he saw now the figure of Sally, the five-year-old Weaver, but, no—she *had* been five. She would be seven now, he thought. He wondered if she would remember.

"Hi, Sally," he called.

The child looked up with a sudden frightened glance, and then, screaming, she ran to the rear of the house.

Arthur went up to the front door and knocked. He could hear the commotion of Sally's sobbing cries inside, and then footsteps approaching the door.

"Hello, Dorothy. I'm sorry I gave Sally such a fright. She couldn't have recognized me after I've been on Cyprian for so long."

"Arthur—!"

It was not an exclamation of welcome. His smile faded as he tried to understand what was in Dorothy Weaver's voice as she spoke his name. Then he had it. Dismay.

She was a heavy, auburn-haired woman who had always had a ready laugh upon her lips, but she had changed in a kind of horrible way. She had lost much weight and her flesh seemed to have sagged without shrinking. Her face looked as if she had not smiled for a very long time.

"Arthur—" she repeated as if in a kind of daze. "I had almost forgotten— Wait just a moment and I'll call Harold."

Carefully she closed the door, leaving him standing outside. The spring wind in the trees felt suddenly cold.

If the Syn hunt had done this to gay Dorothy, what might it have done to his serious, wondering, little Ardyth? He felt a quick panic as if he had to see her that very instant. He almost turned to flee down the walk and find Ardyth where she worked, but the door opened suddenly and Harold Weaver stepped out.

"Hello, Arthur. I'm glad you're back," he said. But in his eyes there was no welcome. "You'll have to excuse Dorothy. We just weren't looking for you, that's all. We can't let you stay more than a minute, but come in and sit down for that long, anyway."

"Yeah—yeah, sure." Arthur picked up his bag and followed Harold into the house. Harold was a thin, bony man of intense energies, but that energy seemed to have been drained out of him. Of friendship there was none; yet once they had been very close.

"I'm sorry about Sally," said Arthur as they sat upon a sofa. "I didn't think I'd scare her even if I had been away so long."

"It's not that." Harold passed a hand over his forehead in a helpless gesture. "It's just all of *this*— We've told her not to speak to anyone—made her afraid to. The sight of a stranger terrifies her since—"

Suddenly he looked up with helpless terror in his eyes. He glanced from Arthur to the doorway leading to the rear of the house. Dorothy was coming in, the trembling Sally beside her.

"Dorothy—" Harold gasped. "Arthur doesn't—*can't* know—"

Then Arthur heard his own voice rising in fear. "What is it? Ardyth—has anything happened to her?"

Dorothy spoke flatly as if beyond all shock, all fear. "She's a Syn, didn't you know?"

IT WAS NOT the face of Ardyth whose image exploded in his mind. Rather, that of slim, terrified Jan Mercer when the CS men took her by the arm and she had cried, "I told you they were wrong and hadn't found the answer—"

They had taken her away to be destroyed like an animal marauder.

"Ardyth—" His voice broke with panic. "They killed her—"

"No," said Dorothy. "She got away. When they think they're about to be discovered lots of the Syns escape. They're clever."

"But you don't believe she was a Syn!" he cried. "Not Ardyth! She was clean, and sweet—and human!"

"Be careful what you say," advised Dorothy. "They've caught a lot of them just by inference and friendship with other Syns. We've got to ask you to go now. They'll be here asking to see our cards again and submit to a special check, just because you came, because you knew Ardyth—"

He tried to find words that would bridge the gap between them. He looked to Harold, but the man only returned his glance helplessly. There was nothing left of the friends he had once known. They were drained to mere husks that bore only the names of the friends he had expected to find.

He got up, his eyes glancing slowly about the room. Here in this house he and Ardyth had known mad, happy times. Here he had made love to her and she had answered his proposal with a promise to marry him. And Harold and Dorothy had been almost as happy at the news as Arthur and Ardyth themselves.

Now Ardyth was gone—dead or worse. And the Weavers had become servants of fear.

"I'll be going," he whispered in hoarse tones that did not seem to be his own voice.

Neither of the others spoke. He moved to the door alone. Only when he opened it did they see the car outside and the men advancing towards the house. Arthur looked inquiringly at Harold. Dorothy had already rushed to the window, tearing aside the shades.

"*They're* here again. What can they want this time? Why don't they leave us alone?"

Two heavy-set men with bleak, friendless faces came into the room as Arthur held the door.

"We've had our monthly examinations and our specials!" cried Dorothy. "We've got our cards. What more do you want of us? Why don't you go away and leave us alone?"

"Take it easy, lady," said one of the CS men. "We're only doing what's necessary. You have a Sally Weaver here?"

Dorothy's face went white with shock. "Sally's our daughter. Leave her alone. Don't you touch her—"

"We have the encephalogram report of Sally Weaver. This was her first, it is indicated. The report is that Sally Weaver is not human. She must be released to us for further testing and disposal."

Harold rose now, his step like that of an old man sick with the cold of age and death's white breath.

"Sally's our daughter. You can't take our Sally—"

"Not your flesh and blood daughter. You adopted her. Is that not true?"

"Yes—yes, but she's like our own. Sally's human, we *know*. Don't you think we'd know if she were some monster?"

"No. No one knows." He looked at the spindly girl who clung behind Dorothy, her arms encircling the woman's wide hips.

The bleak face seemed to sag momentarily in lines of infinite weariness. "*We're* human, too," he said.

"Not if you take our little girl away from us!" cried Harold. "Get out of this house!"

"Be careful, please," the CS man warned. He reached for the thin arm of Sally Weaver.

Dorothy backed quickly as if

shrinking from a cobra's thrust. The officer caught Sally's arm and dragged her away.

For the first time then, she screamed. The cry was a shriller, deeper sound than the ear could endure. A wire knife, it cut through the toughest tissues with ruthless shearing.

"Mommy—don't let them take me! What are they going to do to me, Mommy?"

The fear and terror instilled in her since the discovery of the Syns now bloomed in horrible fruitfulness.

The CS men raged at their own instincts for tenderness towards this thing that was a monster instead of a human. They jerked her roughly through the door. The slamming of it muffled her screams and gave the illusion of sudden distance as if already she were beyond human reach. And all up and down the street mothers crouched in terror by their windows, wondering if their house would be the next stop of the CS car.

Arthur became aware that the scene had passed and he had not uttered a sound. It seemed in fact as if he had witnessed only a reproduction of something that could not possibly have any connection with reality. In a moment someone would appear on the stage and sign the players off and tell him the fantasy was ended.

But Dorothy was huddled on the floor where she had fallen. Soundless sobbing shook the arch of her back. Slowly, she raised a hand and touched Arthur's knee.

"Help us, Arthur," she begged. "Help us get our Sally back. Help us find a way, please—"

CHAPTER III

HE WALKED most of the afternoon, walked the near empty

streets of the city and watched the occasional faces of figures that passed with bent, contracted stride as if against a blast of winter's wind.

Eyes glanced hastily at him from these faces, shying even from this faint contact with another human being, turning away to loneliness and the security of solitude.

Where in all of heaven or hell lay the answer to this ghastly mess? he demanded fiercely of the unhearing silence of the city. Where was Ardyth—hiding in lonely terror from the merciless death that stalked her? He had to know—he had to find Ardyth if she still lived, and he'd kill the man who'd harmed her.

She was no Syn—not Ardyth of the warm lips and laughing eyes.

"We'll have a house just like Harold and Dorothy's" she'd said, "only bigger, to hold three boys and three girls. And when you become very famous you'll have to grow a long, black beard so everyone will know it, because they won't believe that a nice, simple guy like you could be such a noted scientist."

But what if she actually was a Syn? How much difference would that make? The answer was simple. As far as he was concerned, she was as human as anyone he had ever known. If she had been created by a process of evolution that paralleled man's it made little difference that it had begun in a chemical vat instead of a hot, slimy sea.

If she were a Syn, then there was no practical distinction between men and Syns. Wherever she was hiding, he'd find her, and he'd bring her back and defy the whole world to harm or reject her. If the Syns and men had no common ancestor there was no cause for their being unable to live together. There could be peace between them. There *would* be peace, he swore bitterly.

A vow to find Ardyth was easier taken than carried out. Obviously, the murderous forces of Central Security were scouring the city for escaped Syns. If they had failed so far to find her, how could he go about it, and in secret, too, so that he would not lead them to her?

There was an answer to that.

Eddie.

At the thought of the great logic engine he felt a warmth as if at the mention of the name of an old and dear friend. And that is exactly the way it was. The machine *was* his friend, closer now, he thought, than all the human race who had turned to incomprehensible brutality in his absence, who had become willing murderers of innocent Jan and Sally, and who sought the life of the woman he loved.

Eddie would understand these things. He operated only on a basis of clear, logical truth with infallible accuracy. He did not know the erratic emotional inconsistency of human beings.

It was not strange to think of the machine as a friend. Before he went to Cyprian II, Arthur had been in charge of Eddie for a year, and he had gained more skill in manipulation of the engine than anyone else. He had been jokingly accused of building into it a dog-like sense of devotion based on olfactory principles. But his fellow technicians at Allied had long recognized that he could get more and clearer results from Eddie than anyone else could.

Arthur had told Eddie about his engagement to Ardyth. He had consulted the engine about the trip to Cyprian II, and had based his decision largely on Eddie's recommendations.

This, however, was strictly an illegal proceeding because the engine's

time was so consumed by questions of world-wide import that private inquiry was strictly taboo. Everything entering the machine was recorded, and Arthur had had to lock the recorder when using only for personal reasons.

Finding Ardyth now was more than personal, he thought. Establishing peace between men and Syns was of cosmic importance. It might be difficult to convince Dr. Waldron, Allied's Scientific Director, of this, however. If so, he'd have to find some obscure way to get access to Eddie again.

While these thoughts passed through his mind, he had been walking steadily and rapidly in the direction of the plant, and now he came up before the high fence and steel gates that opened onto the grounds of the vast organization.

THE GRAY mass of the building hardly looked more inviting than the rest of the frightened and dying city. He almost dreaded to enter it for fear that all his former friends would be as Harold and Dorothy Weaver—or as Ardyth.

The receptionist was away from her desk as he entered the front door, so he encountered no one until he reached his own laboratory which he had formerly directed. He opened the door of the office which had been his own.

A white-haired man in a laboratory coat was sitting at the desk. He looked up suddenly and then his face broke into a warm and cordial smile. He advanced with outstretched hand.

"Arthur! It's wonderful to see you again. I'd forgotten your ship was in today. We'd have sent someone down—"

"That's all right. I didn't expect a welcoming committee." He pumped the man's hand with a fierce grip.

Doc Trainer was little changed from the way he had appeared when Arthur left. The same warm humanity seemed in him instead of being drained out as with all the others.

"Sit down," he invited, "and tell me all about the horrors of Cyprian."

"They couldn't begin to match those of Earth," said Arthur flatly.

Trainer's smile died, and now Arthur was aware that Doc had not escaped, after all—

"What's it all about?" he pleaded suddenly. "It's got Ardyth. I went by Weavers' and they told me she was a Syn. I've got to find her. What crazy thing has happened to the world since I left?"

"I didn't know—I didn't know about Ardyth. I'm terribly sorry for you, Arthur."

"Tell me what is the answer to all this."

"I wish I could. I wish *someone* knew."

"This story of the Syns; it's a crazy thing! How could a chemical machine go off its base and start making artificial people? That's insane."

"It is—completely insane—and implacably true."

"Ardyth was as human as you or I, and so is little Sally Weaver, but they're going to kill her—murder that child in cold blood because of this wave of insanity that has swept the world."

His face took on astonishment, as if in this moment he comprehended anew the magnitude of tragedy. "It's like the ancient tales of Salem witchcraft, where the pointing finger of a jealous neurotic could destroy an innocent person. That's what this whole thing is—nothing more than a gigantic, world-wide witch hunt!"

Doc Trainer looked suddenly about, then crossed and closed the door

leading to the outer laboratory. "The first thing you've got to learn," he said grimly, "is to stop making statements like that. In one respect this is like a witch hunt. Everywhere are prying ears of sick, jealous humans who will report such remarks as you made, and the CS will act on them, demanding your reexamination."

He shook his head sadly. "But that's as far as the similarity goes. I wish it were only a Salem witch hunt. But the Syns are real. You can ask Eddie for yourself. He is chiefly responsible for our understanding of the problem. He gave us the encephalograph test by which we uncover the Syns."

"Then why can't he tell you how and where they are made?"

"He has told us how, and we have actually duplicated the process and have made some for ourselves. So we know it can and is being done. But he can't tell us where, as you can obviously understand. He doesn't have the data and can't possibly extrapolate it any more than we can."

"I wonder," said Arthur slowly. "It seems to me that he has a good deal of the essential data—"

"You'd better go on up and see Waldron right away. He's got something pretty urgent for you. It has to do with the Syns. CS has taken Eddie over to work exclusively on it, and Waldron thinks you and Eddie may be able to work it out together."

Sudden relief flowed through Arthur. This was better than he had hoped for—being reassigned to Eddie!

"Thanks. I'll go right up."

DR. WALDRON was a scientific executive whose knowledge of a dozen fields was nearly encyclopedic, and whose handling of his organization was as impartial as the judg-

ments of an engineer driving a great machine.

Arthur sometimes thought he was part of the great machine that was Allied Control, and almost looked for the invisible wiring that must connect the Director with the machines of the plant.

Dr. Waldron glanced up sharply as his secretary announced Arthur and led him in. Then he advanced and shook hands firmly, his black eyes scanning Arthur from head to foot as if judging his fitness for further use.

"That was an excellent piece of work you turned out on Cyprian," he said. "We are glad you are back, however. There's a serious project which I want to assign to you. Sit down and I'll tell you about it."

He punched the interphone buttons and leaned forward to the mike. "Please ask Mr. Benson and Mr. Trask to come in."

Benson and Trask; they were new names that meant nothing to Arthur. He felt they were of no concern to him. He didn't want to know anybody named Trask and Benson. He wished that Waldron would ask him just one personal question—how was Ardyth? When did he plan to marry her—?"

Two men entered the office while he considered these bitter opinions of Waldron. The Director introduced them.

"This is Mr. Arthur Zoran, our logic-engine specialist. Arthur, these are Mr. Trask and Mr. Benson of Central Security. You are to work with them during the course of your next assignment."

The men nodded stiff greetings while rage surged high within Arthur. He almost blurted out the turmoil of his feelings as he thought of the other CS men he had seen in recent days—their hands snatching at Jan Mercer, tearing Sally Weaver from her mother's arms—

He held back the words and returned only their greetings—with equal stiffness. Only Dr. Waldron seemed as if the world were as it should be. But his words now belied this.

"What have you heard of the Syns, Arthur?" he said.

Briefly, Arthur repeated the things he had been told, omitting the actual incidents of his previous encounters with CS.

Dr. Waldron nodded when he had finished. "You know now about as much as do any of us who have lived with and fought this thing for the past year or two.

"Allied Control has been given a top priority contract to work with CS on the solution of this thing. We've spent a good deal of time on it—mostly without results. I want you to take over the project because you and Eddie work as a team that can't be matched anywhere else in our organization. Doc Trainer can assist if you like."

"Where am I expected to begin?"

"You're on your own. Pick your lab crew to suit yourself. Call for any facilities you need, never mind the cost. You have a blank check. We ask only that you immediately report any conclusions on possible lines of action."

"We've got to know where the Syns hide out," said Trask as if this thought were the end product of vast cogitation. "And we've got to know where they have set up their reproduction centers. Those are the only two things we need to know. Give us that information, and we'll do the rest to wipe them out."

HE COULDN'T talk to these men, Arthur realized. He couldn't ask any one of them why Sally Weaver and Jan Mercer had to die. They would stare at him with horrible suspicion—and demand that he have a recheck.

The wall between him and the other men was ever thickening and growing higher.

But inside, he felt a joyous exultation. As far as solving his own problem was concerned, they were practically offering him the whole plant.

"Is this wholly agreeable with you?" asked Dr. Waldron.

Arthur nodded. "I've seen enough since I got back to make me willing to put all my effort into such a project. The first thing I'd like is a transcript of all news items and official reports on the subject since the Syns were discovered."

Waldron nodded. "They are already available. I have them here for you. Most of the material, however, has already been put into Eddie. He can give it to you quicker than you can read it."

Arthur spent the remainder of the late afternoon locating an apartment for himself and poring over some of the news material with which he had been provided.

In the reports and editorials there was a universal flame of fanaticism and pseudo-religious zeal to promote the destruction of the Syns.

In that lay the greatest horror of all, he thought. It wasn't merely that the Syns were so much like normal humans and were being hunted and killed. It was the sudden release of world-wide blood lust and violence. Each man who reported or editorialized on the Syns seemed to have become a vessel of wrath calling for the blood of these creatures as if it were some high and sacred duty instead of a loathsome necessity.

Humanity was horrified by the events, and even while they were sick with that horror, they lusted in it. He recalled the faces of those who had gathered about Jan Mercer on the space liner when the CS men captured her. Wild dogs awaiting the kill.

He lay back on the bed, watching the twilight close over the city of despair.

How could he convince such men that there must be peace between Syns and humans?

When it was done, perhaps then the reproductive plants could be dismantled and eventually the Syns would die out and their advent be only a ghastly interval in human history.

Or—perhaps something good would come, something lasting and fine, something more than these brutal killers called humans deserved.

CHAPTER IV

HE COULDN'T sleep. The imaginative night-things of all the ages winged their shadowy way across the city and past each open window. He dreamed he saw them perching on the sill with flaming eyes and ravenous beaks. He heard the ancient witch cries from far across time, and saw the helpless witches of Salem beaten and tortured by men of his own kind, killed in bloody self-righteousness.

Then he raised up and went to the window and understood that those cries were not of fantasy and dreaming. They were real, coming from some distant nucleus of despair down in the city.

Sleep could not be won on this brink of hell. He dressed and went out into the cool night air. He took his own car, which he had recovered from storage, and drove to the silent plant of Allied Control.

It was dark now except for the occasional night light of a watchman. He rang the bell and waited during the long interval still hearing the distant cry in the city until the watchman came to let him in.

He went directly to the laboratory that housed Eddie, and turned on the

lights. The great logic engine was a fantastic thing in the night, but to Arthur it was like an old friend on whose shoulder he could lean in complete trust.

Of them all, Eddie was the one creature in whom sanity remained. Arthur walked slowly past the long, familiar panels. Black and expressionless, they were dotted here and there with meters and inspection windows.

These hundreds of feet of paneling banked high with millions of components formed the most powerful logic engine ever built. It had personality, it had idiosyncrasies that made it an individual. There was no question whatever that it could think.

It was Eddie.

It was a far cry from the anthropomorphic automatons that had preceded Eddie's forbears in men's imagination, but it had powers greater than ever dreamed for those crude tin men.

Arthur opened the door of the control room and sat down at the operating panel. He flipped the master switch.

"Hi, Eddie," he said.

The scanning eyes in front of him seemed almost to blink with surprise, but he knew it was only the adjusting voltage being brought up to properly record his darkened skin.

"Arthur—"

The voice was a pleasant baritone. As in the case of an unseen speaker over radio or telephone, Arthur had imagined long ago the kind of person Eddie would be. He imagined a young engineer about his own age, lean and competent, with a sense of humor matured beyond all childishness. Eddie, as he imagined him, was the kind of a person who would have been his most intimate friend in the flesh.

"Why didn't you come in sooner?"

The sound came from the black core of a speaker mounted beside the eyes. "I thought you'd drop in the instant

you arrived."

"I wanted to see about Ardyth first. Can't you understand that?"

"Of course. I thought you might have found out earlier. You know now, of course, that she was found to be a Syn."

"Yes. They told me she escaped. As far as I know she is still alive and I've got to find her. Can you help me, Eddie?"

"What do you want me to do? What if she is alive and you do bring her back? She'll be killed."

"Eddie—what is the difference between a Syn and a human? Is there any at all except in the matter of parentage?"

"None. Except that the Syns may be a little more sane than your kind."

"Then why can't they live together? Waldron and the officers of Central Security want me and you to figure out how to locate and destroy both the Syns and their reproduction centers. I don't think it is necessary. I think some way could be found to declare peace between the two groups."

"Yes, they've tried for weeks to force me to extrapolate from data I don't have. They mentioned you would be in and that we would be assigned the task of seeing to the Syns' destruction.

"As for your question: You know your own people well enough to answer that. When have they ever allowed a divergent minority to live in peace? Your religious history reeks with betrayal, slaughter, holy wars, oppression of disbelievers and unorthodox believers. For four thousand years you have cried peace and unity and tried to enforce it on a community scale, but you have never understood that until each man achieves his own private tolerance that there can be no brotherly love or peace.

"The answer is 'no'—without any qualifications whatever. The Syns can

not live among you in peace. There is no community of your people upon the whole Earth that would accept them. The most merciful thing that can be done is to carry out the eradication program already begun. Your own personal tragedy would be multiplied ten thousand times if you should ever see Ardyth again. I advise you not to search."

"You're a monster," said Arthur fervently. "You may be the greatest accumulation of brain stuff ever put together on Earth, but there's one thing that you haven't got."

"What's that?"

"Hope."

FOR A LONG time there was absolute silence from the machine. Another operator would have begun to glance aside at the myriad dials and panel lights for indications of breakdown, but Arthur knew Eddie.

He could sense the wave of impulses exploding to the farthest depths of the machine, rebounding and echoing back at the speed of light, searching through the tapes and memory pots for an understanding of the single word that Arthur had spoken.

Then Eddie answered.

"I have no hope. I understand the term only in connection with human beings, and humans characterized by hope are characterized by irrational expectancies based upon mere desire which has no correlation with probability. I see no value in the quality mentioned."

"You never will, Eddie. You'll never know what hope is because it's the thing that makes me a man, and lack of it that makes you nothing but a damned machine that can sit there and tell me to never search for the girl I love."

The machine was silent again for a long time, and then there came a

sound that seemed uttered in the depths of bitterness—and Arthur knew the impression was insane even as he felt it, but he could not shake it off.

"Love, too," said Eddie, "is characterized by irrational expectancies and desires not related to probability."

Then Arthur laughed out loud. "Eddie, you're nothing but a damned old cynic. Now listen, we've got work to do. Get busy and figure me out a course of action. First, I must locate Ardyth. I have hope that Syns and humans can live together in peace. I'm going to work to that end. In order to maintain my position here, I've got to go through the motions of trying to find the Syns who have escaped and the reproduction centers they've set up.

"With those requirements, I want to know the best course of action to follow. Is that clear?"

"Clear, but hardly logical. You will fail on both counts and end up in dismissal from your position here and with a personal tragedy involving Ardyth that cannot be described in the logical terms at my disposal."

"I'll take a chance on it. Shift into high, and give me the dope."

The machine waited as if in reluctance, and this time Arthur did look at the indicator panel. The seeming hesitancy was not in accordance with the design characteristics of the machine. Reluctancy implied will and desires, which the machine certainly did not have, in spite of the human personality with which it was endowed—or which Arthur had imagined into it.

There was no indication of improper operation, however. The lights were green where they should be green and blank where blanks should be. No red appeared at all.

Then suddenly the machine resumed speaking. "The probability is very high," it said, "that you can

find Ardyth if you contact the Syns, letting them think that you are one of them. This will involve no discrepancy because they automatically accept any who are rejected by humans. They could but do not make use of the electroencephalograph."

"How may I contact them?"

"Permit yourself to be treated as one of them. Arrange a scene with officers of Central Security in which you are pursued as a Syn, but allowed to escape. There is an underground organization of Syns of great complexity. They have scattered posts in the city through which they assist such escapes and provide refuge. Let your false pursuit extend over a wide area in those sections near Old Town, and you will be almost certain to encounter a member of the Syn underground who will give you refuge—and eventually lead you to Ardyth."

"Then what?"

"Then what? Then you will marry her and you will go on with your scheme to promote peace between the two groups. In the ensuing conflict, you will be killed."

IT WAS Arthur who paused now without speaking. The voice of the machine was suddenly not his friend, Eddie, the logic engine, but some portentous oracle of doom that he could not defy.

Eddie's statements were not one hundred percent accurate prophecies because Eddie did not have all the data, all the variables which would enter the picture as events moved on. But within the limits of his information, he was infallible.

"Run through it again, Eddie," said Arthur in a low voice. "Find another alternative."

"It won't do any good. I gave it to you the way it comes out."

"Come on. Try it."

There was a brief moment of si-

lence, then the voice of the machine boomed. "There is no alternative. I have given you the only possibilities."

"All right," said Arthur wearily. "I'll take a chance on the variables which you don't know."

"I'll not likely be seeing you again, then," said Eddie. "Goodbye."

It was stupid, he thought, standing there saying goodbye to a machine, but he said it. "Bye, Eddie."

He got in his car and drove away from the silent plant. Through the dark streets of the city the lights of his car moved like the flash beam of some archeologist penetrating the halls of a long dead and forgotten city of ancient times.

He was a fool, he thought, to consider any other course than the infallible program that Eddie had formulated. Kill the Syns, wipe out their breeding centers.

Abandon hope of Ardyth—

Eddie couldn't lie.

But men did not live by infallible logic. They had to live by faith and hope, which the emotionless brain of Eddie pronounced futile. If they ever abandoned those qualities they would be no more than Eddie—mere machines.

From the moment that men first suspected their giant creations of thinking ability, they had feared these brains of metal and glass and streaming electrons, feared them because giant brains like Eddie could never understand that Arthur Zoran had to find the girl he loved—and die in the attempt if that were the requirements of Eddie's unanswerable logic.

Arthur knew Eddie had given him the best possible course of action under the circumstances. He would follow it as closely as possible—and hope to avoid the bitter consequences Eddie predicted.

At dawn he was awake after brief hours of sleep. He went directly to

the plant again and called for a conference with Trask and Benson and Waldron. There he outlined the plan Eddie had given him—omitting the restrictions he had imposed upon the logic engine. The CS officers were not impressed.

"We've tried that," said Trask scornfully. "In every one of a hundred cities we've followed and traced down Syns who have tried to escape. Some of them we even deliberately let go in order to find their hiding places, just as you propose to do. It never got us anywhere."

"Did you ever let one of your own men go in the manner Eddie suggests?"

"No. There are two reasons why that plan is foolish. In the first place, if we ever tried such a thing the mobs would kill the person before he got halfway."

"But some of the Syns do escape."

"Not often. Once you got among the Syns then, and they suspected the slightest thing wrong they'd kill you instantly. And don't think for a minute that they aren't smart enough to find out."

"It's all right with me if you want to risk your neck. We'll cooperate, but you haven't got a chance."

He should have added: That's what Eddie believes, too, Arthur thought, but he merely nodded agreement. "You make the arrangements for me to be tested negatively and provide for some means of escape. I'll do the rest."

CHAPTER V

IT WAS like a great cattle pen. A mass of dejected humanity was crowded into the ugly red stone building housing the CS test program for the city.

Arthur took his place in the long line. Far ahead of him, rough wooden

seats were provided against the dirty walls, but a hundred slumped and beaten human forms intervened between him and those seats. A hundred symbols of defeat. Some sat upon the floor their legs straight out before them. Others hunkered up with heads buried against their knees. And each shifted with a grotesque wriggle of his body as the line moved a step nearer to the point where some would be freed to return to life, and others condemned to ruthless slaughter.

Those who were not sitting on the floor leaned dejectedly against the wall, sliding along it, insistent upon its support, as if they could no longer bear the weight of their own existence.

There was dirt. It was upon the walls where they had leaned and slid along. It was upon the floor where they had scuffed their feet and spat in helpless anger. And it was upon their own persons.

Cattle, Arthur thought. To each of them, who had come once a month for almost two long years, seeing each time more of their numbers consigned to slaughter, it must seem as if they would all be taken if only they came often enough. They were already condemned. It was only a matter of time until their own personal sentence was read.

There were children in the mob, too, lively little children like Sally Weaver, coming for the first time. And some of these would not leave the building this day or else would be recalled with cruel persistence as Sally had been.

He wondered what would happen if he should call for the opinion and vote of these on the question of establishing peace with the Syns. Would there be anyone of these beaten cattle who would refuse a place to the rejected ones when he, himself, might be the next to receive the thumbs

down mark of the gods' disfavor?

He did not understand how it was that some of the Syns could pass the test month after month and be caught only after twenty or thirty testings. It was the defect in the testing procedure, Waldron had explained. Being improved constantly, the test was still far from perfect. They leaned over backwards to make sure that no real human were branded as Syns.

They had told him that a Syn knew his own nature, of course, but if this were true, Arthur could not understand why they simply came to the testing rooms time after time, gambling indefinitely on their uncertain ability to pass. Why didn't they segregate themselves to escape this slaughter?

This was not their purpose, Waldron had explained. Their purpose was to infiltrate and take over human affairs, not to segregate themselves. Besides, they were only damned machines. They had no emotion of hope or yearning for life. Destruction meant nothing to them, individually.

But always, Arthur's criterion was Ardyth.

Ardyth—a machine? Without emotion, without love of life?

Arthur cursed softly to himself. Somewhere they had over-looked some great and important truths about the nature of Syns. He didn't believe Syns actually knew their own natures.

THE MAN in front of him in line had been talking in spasmodic grunts since Arthur came in. Some of his muttering finally entered Arthur's consciousness.

"Nobody comes to buy anything anymore," the little fat man was saying. "Another month like the last one and I'll have to close up. Then what'll happen? I ask you where'll I be then, with my store closed up? These stinking Syns—I wish I could

get a couple for myself."

"Are you sure that you will always be able to pass the test?" said Arthur.

The man turned slowly as if Arthur had called him a dirty name. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded. "Who're you calling a lousy Syn?"

"No one," said Arthur. "But I just wondered how it is that some of us go through and pass the test maybe nine times and on the tenth one are rejected."

"That's because the lousy Syns are so damned clever. They know how to fake their way through the test, but sooner or later they'll all be caught and then the world will get back to normal. If I could only get me a few of them before then," he finished savagely.

Arthur understood their brutality now. Each one believed that *he*, personally, could pass the test forever. But was it true?

"Don't you think it possible that we could live with them?" he said. "Do they really have to be killed?"

The man stared at Arthur as if unable to believe his senses. "You talk like one of them! If I thought you were—"

"No—I've been away for a long time. This is my first test since I got off the ship. I don't know what it's been like living with the Syns loose, but it seemed there ought to be an easier way than all this killing."

"Smashing a lousy machine that's gone mad is not killing. Damn, I'll bet you *are* one of the things, after all. You talk just like one."

By now, others had overheard the conversation, and the little fat merchant turned grinning to them. Don't he talk just like one of them? I'll bet he don't get through the test."

There was sage nodding of agreement.

My brothers. My fellow men! Arthur thought.

A man behind him spoke with some show of kindness. "I just wouldn't talk like that if I were you, buddy. It's not safe—"

"Move along there you guys!" There came the impatient snarls of offended humanity anxious to close the gap that had appeared in the line ahead of Arthur and the merchant. Humanity anxious to have its chance to be tested for damnation, he thought.

It was nightfall when Arthur finally reached the inner sanctum. The technicians had been notified by CS of the plan, but they did not even glance at him as he entered. One of them at a desk was at the panel of a huge punched-card machine.

"Card," he demanded.

"I'm Arthur Zoran."

"Card, please!"

"Arthur Zoran of CS."

The apathetic technician looked up as if unsettled by this interruption of routine.

"Arthur Zoran—oh yes."

He turned away to confer hastily with an older man at the testing equipment. The latter straightened and approached Arthur. His smile was utterly bleak as if there could be no humor or good feeling whatever within the confines of this building.

"We are ready for you, Mr. Zoran," he said. "We hope you are successful."

HE LED the way through an adjacent door to a barren chamber. Inside, he looked about with a puzzled air. "Strange. They must have taken that other fellow out. They told me the euthanasia chamber was full. We had a Syn here just before you that gave the strongest reaction we have seen for a long time. He was

manacled to this ring on the wall.

"Anyway, you are to go out that door which I have just unlocked, across the room. Follow straight down the hall. A car has been left outside. Follow the driveway on out. The guards have instructions to let you pass without question. Two minutes after you leave the grounds the alarm will be sounded in the city signifying the escape of a Syn. After that, you are on your own."

"Thank you." Arthur shook hands with the doctor and watched him disappear back into the testing room.

For an instant, Arthur stood surveying the dirty ante-room to death. Little Sally Weaver must have passed through here, and before her, countless thousands had passed this way going to the euthanasia chamber because they lacked the same kind of humanity as those who judged them.

He shook off the sick pall of fear that exuded from the very walls and approached the door that had been indicated.

He opened it cautiously. Then from out of the dimness of the poorly lit hall a squat, snarling figure hurled itself upon him. Desperate, pudgy fingers wrapped about his throat seeking to encase his neck in a strangling hold.

The assailant was hardly a match for Arthur, his body thin and wire-hard from his years on Cyprian. His own fingers twisted on one fat wrist with crushing force. The grip about his throat disappeared as his enemy twisted away with a cry of pain. Arthur spun him to the floor in a crushing fall that knocked the breath from him.

He lay there groaning and whimpering without rising. It was the blustering merchant who had stood in line all day ahead of Arthur.

Viciously, Arthur spoke. "I guess

you were right. Syns are pretty smart, getting through the tests for months—but they finally get caught, don't they?"

"I'm not a Syn," the man blubbered. "They made a mistake somehow. I tell you I'm not a lousy Syn!"

"You'd like to get yourself a couple before this is over, would you? Well, here are a couple of pretty good ones right here—me and you."

"What are you going to do? I didn't mean to jump you. I thought it was a guard coming." The man struggled to sit up now.

ARTHUR hesitated in pity for the fear-sick creature. But how could he hamper his own flight with this one? Yet if he left the Syn the euthanasia chamber would soon be able to accommodate him.

He wondered how the Syn had broken loose. Then he saw the grotesquely twisted body of the attendant lying in a heap on the floor behind the door. The merchant must have leaped him as the careless attendant unmanacled him. A ring of manual keys were on the floor, but ordinarily the locks were opened by electrical controls which Arthur had watched the doctor operate to free this door for him.

Arthur grinned. "Most Syns must be so dispirited that they don't put up much fight or this fellow would have been more careful. You did a good job on him."

"What are we going to do?" the merchant repeated. "I couldn't make them understand that I'm not a Syn. They won't listen to me."

"Don't you think it was this way with all the others who have gone through here? Don't you think they felt the same?"

"No—they were Syns. They knew they had it coming—"

"How about me? Have I got it coming, too?"

The Syn's eyes widened in a new fear as if the thought had not occurred to him that he was putting Arthur on the other side from himself.

"It's a good joke, isn't it?" said Arthur. "I'm going to get away, and they're going to put one of their own kind in the chamber. Funny, isn't it?"

He understood fully, now. The Syns *didn't* know their own identity beforehand—and not knowing, they shared the common brutality of mankind.

"Take me with you!" The Syn whimpered. "We can find the Syn underground organization. It's big. Tell them I'm one of you and let me live with you among them!"

"You said that Syns and men could not live together."

"Please—we've got to hurry. They'll find us out here."

"But you would not give a single Syn the mercy you are grasping, would you?"

"Please!"

"All right, come on. Let's get out of here."

They went down the long passage without interference, nor did Arthur expect any. CS had prepared the way. It was when they were outside that there would be trouble.

They found the car at the end of the corridor as had been promised. "We'll take this," said Arthur.

His companion got in without speaking, his fat body trembling in every contour. His brow was beaded with perspiration.

Arthur warmed the motor for a few seconds, then gunned it heavily and snapped into the main driveway with a snarl of the wheels. Without a single glance at the guardpost, he burst through the open gates and into the street.

Then from the buildings behind them there came the long low wail of siren warnings, the dread notification

of escaped Syns at large in the city.

Arthur wheeled the fast, heavy car through the dark and silent streets toward Old Town. From far behind came the sound of sirens on CS cars plunging in pursuit. Ahead, he saw the ruins of Old Town dimly silhouetted against the starry sky.

THE NIGHT seemed to become darker as he found the poverty ridden streets bordering Old Town. He cruised down the alleys at the rear of the ancient houses that lined them. On the car he reduced the head beams to a narrow pencil of light.

"Down there!" suddenly exclaimed his companion. He was pointing off towards the darkest, most dismal alley they had seen. "Let's try to hide down that one."

It looked as good as any to Arthur. He wheeled the car into the narrow, debris lined drive, but they could never make contact with the Syns in the car, he thought. They would have to abandon it, but how could he get rid of it without exciting the suspicions of his companion?

He took the only obvious way. As if by accident, he drove at a fast clip into the long row of weathered fencing that lined the alley. The fat Syn screamed as he saw the shattered boards flying through the air and crashing about them.

The terrible crunching died away as all sense of motion vanished. Then they heard the crackle of flames in the dry wreckage.

Arthur dragged the whimpering fat man from the broken car and stood him on his feet, slapping his face vigorously.

"Come on! They'll have the whole block surrounded in a minute."

The distant sirens were nearing, and already they had roused the sleeping neighborhood. Night terror for these people had been replaced by the hope

of vengeance upon some of those responsible for their misery.

"There were sudden cries from windows on every side as they ran down the alley in the glare of the rising flames. "Syns! There they go! Don't let them get away!"

The fat Syn was soon puffing heavily, and the sound of other running feet was plainly heard behind them now. The mob was gathering, and Arthur knew he would have to abandon the fat man to them if he couldn't keep up.

They crossed the street at the end of the alley. Arthur hesitated for an instant to decide whether to turn or to continue along the alley. Blindly, the frightened Syn plunged on ahead. Arthur followed. It was as good a way as any.

He caught up quickly, cursing the stumbling steps and sobbing breath of the Syn.

"Come on, damn you," he snarled. "They'll have us like a pack of wolves if they ever catch up with us."

"What good is it?" The Syn sobbed. "Where can we go? How can we hide?"

In sudden renewal of pity, Arthur realized the hapless Syn was only fleeing blindly without goal or plan in mind. He tried to put himself in the Syn's place, running from certain death. It was impossible, because he had no such hazard. Capture that meant only another freedom for him was sure death for the Syn.

He stopped and patted the soft flabby arm of the merchant. "We'll find our way out of this, I promise you that."

He didn't stop to analyze the utter foolishness of this rash promise. He only looked frantically ahead into the darkness, hoping for the sight of a beckoning Syn who might offer them refuge and safety. From behind, the mob sounds increased.

Abruptly, a tube of light thrust down through the darkness from far behind, bathing them in a brilliant flow of illumination. At once the cries increased to a howling fury. Arthur looked back. It was a spotlight mounted on one of the CS cars that was trying to force itself down through the mob choking the alley.

The crazy fools! They didn't have to make it so realistic, Arthur thought. In that light it would be almost impossible for a Syn emissary to reach them and lead them out of the way. He suspected Trask and Benson had given orders that punches were not to be pulled in any degree whatever.

HE RESUMED flight, dragging the despairing Syn by one arm. With a moan of anguish, the Syn jerked back, pointing to the opposite end of the alley that was now visible in the light of the CS beam. The alley ended abruptly in a board wall.

The CS car was at the head of the mob now a scant hundred yards behind them. The officers could pick up their quarry at will. Any holding back by them would betray the purpose of this make-believe flight.

It was a stupid thing to have run into a dead end alley, but even if they hadn't done so Arthur wondered just how escape might have been possible. He felt a deep respect for those Syns who had achieved freedom in such pursuit as this. Ardyth, he thought, had succeeded.

But suppose he *were* a Syn? He wouldn't be giving up even now. He would be driving every neuron of his brain to produce an answer, a way out of this dead-end alley.

It made a difference. Self preservation instincts were active in his Syn companion even though failing Arthur.

"There's trash at the end," said the

Syn. "Maybe we can scale the fence."

"Right. Let's make it to the end as fast as we can go."

They slammed their bodies into the fence and hung gasping as if impaled by the force of their momentum. Like some terrible piston thrusting along the cylinder in which they were trapped, the mob with the CS car at its head was driving down the narrow alley.

The Syn moved towards the trash pile and began struggling to the top of it in the full glare of the light. He reached for the top of a stack of crates to hoist himself up. Slowly, the pile arced back under the impetus of his weight. He screamed in panic as the pile tilted and fell, his cries becoming lost in the rumble of collapsing boxes and shattering crates.

Arthur leaped to tear the pile of material from on top of his companion. He could hear the individual cries of the mob where there had been only a mass of indistinguishable sound before.

"Don't let them get away! Kill the dirty Syns! Get behind the fence—don't let them get over it—"

"Stand still and raise your hands or we'll shoot!" This was a cry in which Arthur recognized the authority of the CS voice. But he continued his task of rousing the fallen Syn.

"Get up!" he demanded fiercely. "Get up or I'll leave you there."

He didn't know if the Syn were hurt or not; there was no chance of examination now. Then, as he straightened from shifting the debris, he noticed the thin, dark line of a gate in the high fence, a gate revealed by the collapse of the pile of debris.

The Syn stood, shaken, and looked into the glare of the lights.

"We're lost!" he moaned.

"There's a gate right here behind the trash," Arthur said. "Can't tell if it's locked or not, but let's rush it together. They'll fire as we move, but

one of us may make it."

They moved as one man, scrambling over the pile of trash, then down behind the peak of it. Their bodies smashed into the gate. It remained, a solid immovable part of the fence.

THEIR SWIFT rush signaled the crash of bullets, thundering in the alley. Splinters whined as they twisted through the air. Arthur dragged the Syn down, hiding partly between the fence and the trash pile.

Then from somewhere that seemed almost beside them they heard a new and unbelievable sound—the answering thunder of gunfire directed towards the mob.

Arthur raised his head in careless amazement. From a narrow crack between the boards he saw another burst of fire. Then a voice snarled huskily at them. "Get down, you fools. We'll have this gate open in a minute—there. Come on through!"

There was screaming in the alley. Someone had been hit by those defending bullets. Now the mob was firing on its own. Arthur heard the cursing cries of the CS men trying to halt the angered group, threatening to fire into them. But the officers were helpless now, and Arthur understood they would not fire into the mob to save even him. They couldn't without risking their own lives. This was what Trask had warned against.

Bullets crashed close as he fell through the open gate with his Syn companion. Hands reached for them in the darkness beyond the fence. Firm hands clutched each arm and led them swiftly away towards the dark buildings nearby.

"The mob will be over that fence in a few seconds!" Arthur warned. "We've got to get away from here."

"Let us take care of that," said the stranger at his left.

They hurried into the darkest shad-

ows as the first wave of the mob broke over the fence and crashed through the gate, choking it with their own bodies.

Then, in the half darkness of the scene, Arthur saw two shadowy figures dart away from the mob. The cries of rage funneled in their direction and swift pursuit was renewed. He understood then. Two skilled Syns were acting as decoys for himself and his companion to lead the mob away while they were guided to safety.

The four who had rescued him watched in silent satisfaction, then one turned in the darkness and spoke. "We welcome you, fellow Syns. Welcome to the brotherhood of outcast humanity!"

CHAPTER VI

IN THE distance on one hand the sounds of the mob died, and on the other the crackle of flames was subdued by the hiss of foam clouds. Silent darkness settled over the sick and weary city once again.

At the side of the building the Syns opened a cellar door leading into the depths beneath. Without lights, they moved by sense of perception only. An increasing smell of mustiness became nearly stifling. After a time they halted, the guides fumbling with some hidden door catch in the darkness.

Then, as a portal opened, the party passed through and the door slammed behind them as if with a heavy seal, shutting out all sound, engulfing them in silence that bore the illusion of utter sanctuary. The lights came on with blinding suddenness.

"Welcome to the country and possessions of the Syns."

Arthur turned to the guide who spoke. He might have been a lithe and muscular man once, but his face was bleached a sickly color now as if

he had lived in this warren away from the sun for a long time.

They were all like that. Their faces and bodies bore the marks of hiding and living with the constant fear of pursuit and death.

"We've forgotten the names we once had," the Syn guide said, "just as we've had to forget we once were humans. Lack of identification has some precautionary features, which is the main reason for its adoption. I am known as James. These men are Clark, Wallace, and Barkley. You may introduce yourself by any term you choose, and it will be that by which you are known for the rest of your life among us."

Arthur saw no good reason for assuming a pseudonym. "I am Arthur," he said.

"Good enough, and you—?" He turned to the fat merchant who hesitated as if suddenly intrigued by the necessity of framing a mask to hide him all the rest of his days, a mask that had to be a golden, magnificent thing to counterbalance the shoddy, unbelievable fate that had befallen him.

"Laurence," he said with exaggerated motions of his mouth and lips as if savoring some delicacy. "I like Laurence. I shall be Laurence."

Even the four Syns smiled at this feeble attempt of the merchant to elevate himself with a name.

"Laurence it shall be," said James. "Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen. You will rest a day or two here. I suppose you haven't eaten—?"

There was a small and ancient freezer well stocked with food, and canned goods were stacked on shelves. Arthur wondered about their source of supplies and activities that were directed from this location. He wondered about Ardyth, and how much closer he was to her because of this step.* But those questions would have

to wait for later answers.

He sank down on one of the ill-kept beds and closed his eyes. He let the reaction come now, the reaction of understanding how close he had been to death in that alley trap. There was something he didn't like about that. The fact was not in the probability that Eddie had given. The logic engine had not indicated danger at this point, though Trask and Benson had warned of it.

In dismay, he suddenly recognized that if Ardyth had adopted a pseudonym somewhere in the warrens of the Syns she was still as remote as ever.

He sat up sharply.

"What happens next?" he demanded. "Where do we go from here?"

CLARK SPOKE up from beside the tiny, radiant stove, where he cooked. "Go? You don't go anywhere from here. This is the end of the world, didn't you know?"

James rose from his own bed across the room. He smiled without humor and came over to put a hand on Arthur's shoulder. On the way, he patted Clark's back affectionately.

"Don't let Clark get you down with that. We've got better plans than that, but he's only been here a couple of months. The rest of us have been here over a year—old timers."

They were young, Arthur discovered with a kind of shock. James had thick black hair that once had been well cared for. He'd been a good looking guy before this. All of them, except for their unnatural pallor, could have passed for ordinary, competent young engineers or technicians, young husbands and fathers of normal society.

"We're as human as the rest of the world," said James savagely. "Don't ever forget that. Just because they've kicked us out doesn't mean that we're

some robot monsters. We're men! Get that into your skull and don't ever let it out. The classification as Syns changes nothing of your actual nature. You're exactly what you were before you acquired a new name. You're a man, understand?"

"No. If I'm a thing made by a machine I am not a man and never can be."

"You can go crazy—just like a man—and that's what will happen if you keep on thinking like that. Listen: We're everything that men ever were and a lot more besides. Think of that crazy, howling mob out there that nearly murdered you. Would you be glad to be one of *them*?"

"Syns are more than men. We're the new inheritors of Earth. Look at the mess that men have made of Earth ever since they had it. They're born and bred and live out their miserable lives tottering on the very edge of insanity, and half of them dip over during a good part of their lives."

"The Syns can never do that. We're sane. We're whole. We're what men might have become and never did. And we'll replace men in the end, and make something of this world that they've torn up with their wars."

"You needn't be ashamed. You can be proud you are a Syn. You shall inherit the Earth!"

James' voice had risen and his jaw muscles stood out in knots at the side of his face. His eyes burned with fierce conviction.

Arthur watched him, his eyes searching the finely shaped skull, the pallid skin through which forehead veins pulsed feverishly. This was something that Arthur had not dreamed of. He had pictured the Syns as beaten dregs of life that had once passed for human. In James he seemed to be witnessing the resurrection of a man.

"How will that come about?" he said quietly. "Will we be forced to resort to the same force that you have branded as insanity in men?"

"We may. We hope not. In the end, we'll simply out-number men. Then all killing will stop. We'll give men a piece of the Earth to live on, and show them how to live if they'll listen. If they won't, we'll let them die out through lack of breeding. But whatever men do, the world belongs now to the Syns."

THE SIX of them moved to sit about the table as Clark finished setting out the food. Laurence seemed suddenly as pale as if he'd remembered some long forgotten ghost.

"My family might be sitting down to dinner now," he said in a muted voice. "They won't know about me, will they? They won't know at all—"

He looked at the circle about him, his moon face warping with grief.

"Let it come, fellow," said James quietly. "We all went through it. Lie down on the bed there if you don't feel like eating anything."

Arthur covered the awkwardness of Laurence's weeping. "How can the Syns increase their numbers under present condition? It seems more likely to me that we'll be exterminated."

"We're working night and day to find the reproduction centers," said James. "When we do we'll be able to control them and guide all new Syns to us, where they can be protected until they develop."

"You mean you don't know the locations of the machines that produced us?" exclaimed Arthur. "Are there no Syns who have memory of their connection with the machine?"

"Barkley claims a kind of recollection, but he can't be sure. None of the rest of us have any. Rather, most of us remember families and parents just like any one else. That's because the machine put those memories into

us so that we could pass as conventional humans without betraying our origin. Everything would have gone as the machine planned if that damned logic engine hadn't discovered this one betraying feature that the encephalograph reveals."

"Haven't you been able to test these memories by contact with parents, for example, after being declared a Syn?"

"Wallace, you tell the man about that."

The black eyes of Wallace were deep in his cavernous face and roily with bitterness. "I tested it," he said. "I went back to my parents' house after I was told I was a suspected Syn. They told the CS men they had never seen me before. They threw me out to be killed without a word of recognition or sympathy."

"You can't blame those people!" exclaimed James. "It was true they had never seen you before. The machine had given you memories of parents like them so you assumed you were their son. It must have terrified them to have a total stranger walking up claiming to be their son—and a Syn, at that. They aren't to blame."

"I don't know," said Wallace wearily. "I just don't know any more. But I do know that we have to push on as if we did know all the answers. I've got to believe in the machine, and in the Syns. There's no man in whom I can believe any longer."

"We're going to locate those machines. Maybe Syns in other parts of the world have already done so. One major problem is establishing communication with such groups. We are handicapped in that, you can understand."

"Before I left Earth for Cyprian II where I spent the last couple of years," said Arthur slowly, "I was engaged to marry a girl. While I was gone, she was found a Syn, and escaped. My first objective is to find her—if she

is still alive. Here is her picture. Her name was Ardyth, if she has not changed it. Have any of you ever seen her?"

He passed the photo around the table and it came to rest in front of James. The big, tense man seemed to go a shade more pallid, and Clark gave a sudden snort.

"Know her? We haven't heard of anything else for weeks. James has the idea that she has promised to marry *him*!"

CHAPTER VII

THEY REMAINED within the warren the following day. At nightfall, James planned to take them to the Syn's central headquarters. They ate light meals, mostly from force of habit, for all hunger except that for freedom and companionship had left them.

James' attitude throughout the day was perceptibly colder, but at times he tried to make up for it with spasmodic over-demonstrations of friendliness. Arthur liked the Syn group leader in spite of his fantastic claim to Ardyth.

He was not afraid of any possible validity to that claim, but Ardyth's treatment the past year might have thrown her into such despair that she had abandoned the dreams she and Arthur had known, and had sought refuge in such love as James offered her.

He felt sorry, too, for he sensed that James' love for her was real, and his burden of bitterness would be doubled when she had to renounce him. He almost hoped their two Ardyths were not the same. But James said there was no doubt of the identity, and promised to take Arthur to her.

As evening approached, a sense of urgency and expectancy began to grow in the movements of the four Syns who understood what was ahead of

them at this time.

"I want to show you our communication system, now," James told Arthur. "It's about time for our scheduled roll call."

He took Arthur to a small adjacent room which none of them had entered during the day. Within it was a broad table covered with a litter of crude but ingenious-looking equipment. James sat down at the chair before the table.

"The city is ringed by such posts as ours. Communication is by infrared beams. Each post is in line of sight with at least two others. These eyepieces will give you a look at the two others adjacent to us."

Arthur bent down to peer through. Along a very narrow and precarious line of sight, he saw distant, unobtrusive buildings like the one that covered their warren. One seemed about a mile away, and the other somewhat less.

"An automatic alarm rings when either line of sight is accidentally or purposely obstructed," said James. "It is our only source of communication. In just a moment our turn for roll call will come."

Even as he spoke, a small light began flashing on the table. He put on a set of phones and listened carefully, then began tapping an ancient telegraph key.

The contact finished, he laid down the phones and glanced up speculatively at Arthur. "It seems your fame has spread already. We reported your arrival in routine contact last night. The First Created has a detailed report on you and orders your appearance tonight. Special guard arrangements are being made for your safety. You must have something the First wants pretty badly."

"The First Created—who is he?" said Arthur. "You haven't mentioned him before. And how did he get such a report on me?"

James smiled. "There's a lot that I haven't mentioned, but you'll find out gradually. The First is our leader. He was the first one created by the machines, and we have him to thank for the organization and relative security that we enjoy. He was especially endowed by the creating machine with many qualities that the rest of us lack."

"But even he does not know where the machines are located?"

"No. He has assigned that to all of us as our prime goal."

During the day, James had prepared counterfeit test cards for Arthur and Laurence. These, he turned over to them now.

WHEN IT was too dark for observation without lights, but not late enough to be conspicuous, they left the warren. Arthur discovered then that the upper quarters, the house itself, were occupied by an old lady who kept "roomers". A Syn, she fronted for the warren. Similar setups camouflaged the other posts about the city.

They left in two groups of three. James and Clark went with Arthur in the first car. Many minutes later the other three departed in an entirely separate direction.

For the first time, Arthur was seeing the city as one of the ostracized. He sensed how high and how strong was the wall that separated the Syps from mankind. There was terror in it that made him want to rush out and frantically proclaim his humanity.

Then he looked askance at his companions and knew that he could never fully comprehend their feelings for they could not be moved to such a proclamation. They *knew* they were not of the substance of mankind.

In the busiest part of town Clark took the car on alone. Arthur and James went into a public restaurant and ordered a meal that offered more

substance than the cooking in the warren, which was emergency type only.

The division of the party was perhaps necessary camouflage, Arthur thought, and their coming here was part of a desperate yearning to believe that men were once more kindly creatures who could be trusted and made friends with.

As they ate, Arthur glanced about. People talked but little or not at all. Most were alone at single tables, eyes concentrating on their food in desperate intensity as if afraid of unseen enemies who might seize them momentarily.

Suddenly the heads of the diners raised as if at news of some reprieve. Their eyes gradually lighted with bestial anticipation.

Arthur turned to the direction of their gaze. In the street a knot of people was swiftly growing to a writhing mob that blocked all traffic on street and walks. Its nucleus could not be discerned fully, but the top of a car showed in the center of the mob.

"What—?" Arthur began, and then he understood by the expression on the faces of the mob. He had to eat while murder took place before his eyes.

The diners were rising and rushing to the window in gleeful expectancy. One flabby, well dressed man stopped at their table in breathless excitement. "Come on!" he invited. "Looks like they've caught another one of those lousy Syns out there. Don't you want to watch it?"

"No thanks," said Arthur easily. "We have an appointment we must meet—have to finish up here so that we can be on our way."

James had stopped eating, his face bloodless with panic. For the first time Arthur realized how close the Syn was to cracking up. Long months of hovering death had put a thin edge

to his resistance. The Syns were not the strong men they claimed, he thought. The ostracism and the constant threat of death was as heavy a burden to them as it would have been to a man.

OUTSIDE, the sound was like that at some magnificent sporting event. This was the way it must have sounded in the Colosseum of ancient Rome. This is the way it must have been while Joan of Arc burned, and while the witches of old Salem died.

He felt as if the food inside him were being loaded onto a catapult, but he warned the Syn sharply. "Start eating!"

James nodded with even greater understanding than Arthur possessed. "I've seen mobs in a mood like this grab up anyone who looked as if he disapproved in the slightest degree."

Some of the color returned to his face as if the panic had come under control. "We can slip out the side door facing the other street when we're through," he said.

Arthur tried to keep his eyes and thoughts on his food, but he kept hearing the obscene sounds from both the street and his fellow diners who crowded the windows. Then he heard the other sounds that were the cries of the attacked, the sound of human despair.

"I'm not a Syn—! Won't somebody believe me? I tell you they made a mistake—!"

James stiffened, half rising in his chair.

"Easy, you fool!"

"That voice—it's—"

"Yes, but tell me what we can do about it."

"Nothing—nothing—"

The top of the car had seemed vaguely familiar, Arthur thought. As James sank slowly to the chair again, they both imagined the three Syns out there—Barkley and Wallace, and

frightened, fat little Laurence who had chosen a brave name to cover the fear that was in him.

Arthur wondered how on Earth they had been spotted—and if they, then why not he and James?

Breaking glass tinkled through the screams. It was a brutal miracle that on such a barren street so many rocks could be found so quickly. Then there was the sudden flash of yellow flame and the odor of burning oil.

The mob uttered its own cries of warning and backed from the billowing flames. Heat forced them even from the window and then Arthur could see his companions of those brief night hours.

Wallace was slumped over the seat of the car, his face almost beyond recognition with the work of the stoning. On the street, Laurence was huddled, his squat body like a small tent billowed out to full expanse. His head rolled back and forth while vain prayers for mercy gorged from his throat.

Barkley was still upright and fighting back. Reaching for the stones as swiftly as they came, he had already forced back a small segment of the mob with his fury.

Although the heat from the burning car had driven them far back from it, he stood as if unnoticed, and Arthur heard the awed whisper of a man by the window.

"Look at it! A man couldn't stand that, but he doesn't even notice it. You'd almost think we could have made some use of them."

"We could—if they didn't think they were as good as men. But I wouldn't want to run the risk of having a single one of them loose. When we get them cleaned out, I'll be the first to suggest lynching anyone who dares proposing that any be retained for any purpose."

"Yeah—I guess you're right."

BARKLEY had fallen now and the bulge he had driven in the mob quickly filled and curved towards him in revenge for his temporary triumph. His head was crushed and bleeding, but slowly he struggled to his feet, his face almost obliterated.

Slow curses of awe were murmured by the watchers at the window. "If men only had guts like that—"

"But it's not a man. Nothing but a damned machine. That isn't guts—it's only lack of feeling. Sure does look real, though, doesn't it? Blood and everything—"

The hand of Barkley passed slowly across the bloody face, and in that mangled contour Arthur saw—or imagined he saw—a face of deep peace that he had never seen upon a man.

More than men—James had said. Was it true? Were these the successors to mankind in their inheritance of the Earth?

The figure of Barkley collapsed suddenly before the onslaught of stones and fire, and Arthur thought of other causes that had risen Phoenix-like from martyrs' ashes. Barkley's fall was not the fall of merely a Syn. It was, perhaps, the fall of all mankind.

With leisurely disinterest, Arthur rose from the table. Together, he and James strode towards the counter. The sickness eating within James had retreated enough so that he smiled at the cashier. "Do we pay extra for the show?" he inquired.

But it was lost upon her. Already she was sinking back into the dread uncertainty of the coming night in which no man would know his neighbor, and the fearful witch hunt would go on.

She accepted his money and they walked out as the diners who had watched by the windows returned to their cold plates. Outside, the thick vapor of oil smoke hung low in the

street and carried with it the stench of burned flesh.

"Which way?" said Arthur.

"To the right. Clark should pick us up along the street here somewhere."

The car in which they had left the warren slid to a stop beside them almost before he was aware of it. Clark's face was haggard and wild with suspicion of pursuit.

They climbed in beside him, and he drove off with a cavalier wheeling of the car.

"Take it slower," cautioned James. "You saw back there?"

"Yes, I was almost even with them when it happened. It was horrible. Thank Heaven I'm not a human! They are monsters that ought to be wiped off the Earth. It will be easy enough for me to take part in any extermination of them."

"But you had seen the same thing before—from the other side—"

Clark nodded slowly. "Yes. Once I even laughed when I saw a Syn dying. I thought he was no more than a grotesque, mechanical thing."

"If that's the way *they* felt then perhaps we can't blame them too much."

"Oh, I don't know! How is it possible to see both sides—to have been on both of them without becoming insane?"

Clark was right, thought Arthur, and he had forgotten until now the vicious pleasure of Laurence anticipating that Arthur might be shown up as a Syn.

It made no sense. They were all swabbed with the same black brush, men and Syns—until the separation came that proved one to be a man and the other a thing of artifice.

He was sure he did not have the whole picture yet. Elements were lacking that had to be fitted in to give reason and coherency to the in-

sane puzzle.

"How were they spotted?" James asked. "I thought we were covered perfectly."

"It was one of those things that wouldn't happen in a thousand years. The euthanasia guard Laurence slugged was passing on the street and recognized Laurence in the car. He screamed the word Syn, and that was it.

"The crowd bared their fangs and started drooling for blood. I don't see why we are almost like them before we are separated out, and why we can't do our own separating before they try us for our lives."

James ignored the question that Clark placed. Instead, he pointed ahead to the mass of buildings that rose at the end of the street.

"This is it."

ARTHUR stared ahead. The structures were those of the Exner Construction Company, interstellar engineers. It was they who had built the basic structures into which Arthur had assembled the automatic machines for the factories of the Cyprians.

"How can you meet here?" he exclaimed. "How can you keep a thing like this secret in the middle of a great plant like Exner?"

"We don't have to," James smiled with faint humor. "The entire Exner Company is the nucleus of the Syn organization."

"But I've worked with their engineers!"

"Then you have worked with Syns. Dr. Exner himself is the First Created."

"I've seen him from a distance only, but I know his men consider him a first rate genius."

"He is, and you'll soon find it out for yourself."

Clark drove the car through the

heavy steel gates, flashing a signal at a watchman that admitted them. They came to a stop near the large, four story administration and design building.

Arthur followed his companions up the somewhat familiar stairway and corridors. He tried hastily to recall what he knew of Dr. Exner. The man had once worked for Allied. He had worked on the design of Eddie during the first planning of the logic engine, and he had been called in for work and consultation during the time Arthur was on Cyprian.

Exner had always remained uncommunicative and reserved. He made few friends among the staff at Allied, but no one ever doubted his ability or his genius.

For Arthur, however, it was utterly impossible to imagine him in the position of Syn leadership, for him to be the mystic so-called First Created.

James stopped abruptly before a broad door of grandly polished wood. He pressed a small case against an unobtrusive panel near the center of it. The door swung inward, and they were in the presence of Dr. Exner, First Created of all the Syns.

CHAPTER VIII

HE WAS looking up at them from behind the massive desk that was covered with a few neatly arranged papers. He had the same unhealthy pallor that Arthur had come to think as the hallmark of the Syns. It was almost a grayish tinge that matched the close-cropped hair. The lines of his bullet-shaped head were revealed with unattractive clarity, and the grayness of his hair seemed distinguishable from the grayness of his face only by the textural quality of each.

"I am happy to see you, Arthur Zoran," he said slowly. "I had long

hoped that your return to Earth would find you in our midst. The Syns have great need of your talents.

"You have done very well, James and Clark. Please leave us now, and I will continue the instructions you have so well begun."

The shadow of hostility, absent the past hours, fell again over the face of James, but his smile belied it. "I'll be seeing you," he said. He left with Clark in tow.

"Sit down, please," said Dr. Exner. "I am sure that James has answered many of your preliminary questions, but if there is anything in particular that you want to know I'll try to answer it for you."

"There's only one thing I want to know: The whereabouts of my fiancée, Ardyth Crane. James claims to know her—that she has promised to marry him. I want to see her."

"There is an Ardyth here—one of our most excellent and valued workers."

Arthur flashed the small plastic picture across the desk. Dr. Exner glanced at it briefly and nodded. "She is the one of whom James spoke. I will take you to her as soon as we are through here."

Take me to her, now, you damned old fool! Arthur thought fiercely.

But there was no way on Earth to force the impassive mask that faced him across the desk. The whites of Exner's eyes seemed curiously large and alive almost as if with a light of their own. It gave his whole face an expression of high, fanatic purpose, in which the destiny of any human—or any Syn—was of small consequence.

He was silent for a long moment, and then he began speaking in a voice so low that for a moment Arthur wondered if he had missed the first words.

"We are the future race of man-

kind," said Exner. "We are the super race of which idealists have dreamed down through the ages. The destiny of Earth is in our hands."

"But we have to find first who made us, and how," said Arthur. "That is what James told me."

"He is correct. That is our immediate goal, and I think you will be able to help us find the answer—you and our mutual friend, Eddie."

"Eddie!"

"Yes. I think Eddie knows where the machines are."

Arthur thought swiftly back to that night when Eddie had denied such knowledge. Almost he forgot his double role to blurt out the fact of his previous questioning of Eddie and the denial.

"You will be interested—and perhaps amazed—to learn how I first came to know of our inheritance," said Exner. "The logic engine was directly responsible for it."

"How was that possible?"

"It was when I first planned the organization of my own company. I was nearing the end of my contract with Allied and wanted to get an engine analysis on my plans. Since this was forbidden, of course, I secretly used the machine one night on the pretense of necessary repairs to it.

"During the course of feeding in my personal data, the question of time came up, time which might be available to me to build up the kind of organization I envisioned. As I proceeded I kept getting the most absurd answers with respect to time. Finally, I put the question directly as to why such answers were given. Eddie replied that they were not meaningless and asked if I did not know that I was virtually immortal—that I had at least ten life spans in which I might plan and proceed with my work."

"The Syns have such a life span?" Arthur exclaimed.

DR. EXNER nodded as if trying to convey the magnitude of that discovery as he had felt it on that night.

"Then the engine almost expressed amazement that I had not deduced the logical fact of my artificial creation from the factors I had given it. Eddie went on to describe in great detail how Syns originate in one of the automatic chemical research plants in exactly the same way that all life originated in the primal chemical vat of the sea."

"It's an almost impossible thing to believe," said Arthur. "Is there no other evidence except the story of the logic engine? Couldn't he tell more of this plant that did the work? And how can we be sure he did not withhold something of importance?"

"You're an engineer on logic engines. You know the safeguards against error. Besides, I put the data into him again and again. All through the night I checked and got the same answers.

"But in one respect I believe you are correct in your questioning. I think information has been held back—but only because the question has not been properly asked by one capable of understanding the answer. You are the one I consider able to ask the question and receive that answer."

"I don't know—perhaps—"

Arthur was imagining such a night as Dr. Exner had known. He felt a sympathy for the lonely man who had been the first to suddenly learn he was not of human kind.

"What did you do when you found this out?" he asked.

"What would any ordinary man have done? I expected to get married soon. How could I—a thing that was not even a man? I made careful checks. The memory that I had was one implanted by the machine. Nothing of the things I remembered could

be checked with reality very closely. Parents were dead in the War, of course. I told the girl I was to marry that I could not go through with it. I broke her heart as well as my own.

"Then gradually I began to see the import of the knowledge I had been given. It was something that went far beyond my own petty welfare. It concerned the whole world of men and Syns, for I was the only one of either who knew of the existence of a division between them."

"Didn't Eddie reveal the knowledge to others?"

"I cautioned against it, and introduced factors into the circuits to prevent it, but I knew that they would be removed sooner or later. There was no logic in my desired suppression, so I knew that it would eventually come out. I was hardly prepared for the way in which it was revealed."

"How was that?"

"You should know, first, what I did to prepare the way for other Syns. Eddie gave the electroencephalograph test to me and I used it to build up this company of Syns. Not one of us had an inkling of our identity before the test revealed it. I made the tests during occupational interviews.

"The War wiped out most family connections of the present generation so that, in general, family remembrances were impossible to check. In some instances there was conflicting information. Parents seemed to have a definite knowledge of the birth of their child, who was a Syn. Some of this data has not yet been adequately accounted for, chiefly because all our work has had to be concealed.

"We were a bewildered, half embittered lot, aware of our own bastard inheritance and not knowing exactly what to do with it. We laid plans

to find the centers of reproduction that had turned us into the stream of humanity to take the part of men. This remains our greatest task.

"Then, overnight, everything changed for us. Eddie revealed to an Allied technician while you were gone that he was also a Syn and explained the significance, evidently in response to forbidden questioning of the kind I had done. The knowledge broke the mind of the creature, and when he was examined the whole story got out. Then the horror of extermination began.

"We quickly prepared counterfeit defenses for ourselves. We learned to modify our brain waves to pass the tests, but we could do nothing except watch while thousands of our fellow Syns were slaughtered. We had no way of locating them *first*.

"But along with horror came a purpose to our existence. We saw the many ways in which we are superior to men. We watched the insanity of the witch hunt spread to the whole world, and we understood our destiny.

"We are ready now to take what is our own. And do not believe that we come with a gospel of peace. Ours is as bloody as men's. The post you were taken to was no mere warren. It is an arsenal, a fort. A score of them ring the entire city, and they mount weapons whose force can make it all ours within short hours. Ten thousand trained Syns wait night and day for my command to take what is rightfully ours.

"I want no peace. I want Syns to hate humans forever, and someday there will be no humans at all, and Syns shall inherit the Earth and make of it the garden it was meant to be. And you—you shall help us, though your miserable, short life will hardly make it possible for you to take part in the enjoyment of our paradise!"

DR. EXNER'S face split abruptly in a thin smile of inexplicable intent. Arthur leaned forward as if by close scrutiny he could read the hidden meaning momentarily revealed.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

Exner's face relaxed quickly into a gray mask again. The overhead lights cast a curtain of shadow over his cheeks and his eyes were like great pools of porcelain through which the tiny pupils looked with omniscient glare.

"I mean," he said, "that your little play has fooled no one. You had not a chance in the world of making your way into our organization by playing that you were a Syn. You were watched and led along the entire way."

Arthur felt as if the base of his tongue were suddenly swollen too large for his throat. His words seemed harsh as they came from his dry mouth.

"I don't understand—I don't understand what you mean—"

"Of course you do! We are not fools. Do you think we could have existed this long if we had no better safeguards against intrusion than you have supposed?"

"We know that you are a human. We know that you came to spy on us, hoping to determine the source of our reproduction in order to destroy us. We know that is your job."

"How do you know that?"

"Trask and Benson gave us the first word that you were coming. They are both Syns. So, likewise, is the doctor at the examination center who passed you through. As you may guess, he frees the most valuable of the Syns and sends as many humans to their deaths. We like the irony of that.

"And then your little companion, Laurence, was placed to spot you and

lead you. Do you understand?"

With shameful hindsight, Arthur recalled now the offhand way the fat merchant had suggested the alley down which they should go, how he had been the one to reveal the gate in the fence by tearing down the trash pile—

"If all this supposition is true, what happens next? You didn't let me come here just to be killed. That much is obvious."

"No. We let you come—we wanted you to come—because we need you. We planned to obtain your help in any manner possible, but Eddie solved that problem very nicely by sending you to us.

"We need access to the logic engine. You are our only contact that is competent to handle it." Doc Trainer is also one of us, and we had high hopes when he was appointed to fill your place, but he has failed to get the information we need.

"Then I proposed this plan. You will be sent back to Allied, reporting tentative failure, but will keep on trying to accomplish your original purpose. You will report to *us* through the CS men, what you learn of our origin from Eddie. Trask and Benson, incidentally, will shoot without warning if you attempt betrayal. They are authorized as CS humans to kill on their own initiative, and it would cause little concern in these days of nervous minds and quick killing."

"Why did you go through all the shadow play of my coming here through my own plan? Why wasn't I simply kidnapped?"

"That would have destroyed much of your usefulness. As it is, you have a legitimate relationship with both our group and your own. You will proceed to find the answer—just as both groups desire. But you will report only to us!"

"And what makes you think I will

do all this quite willingly, and without, perhaps, selecting my own death as the alternative?"

"Why?" Dr. Exner suddenly assumed an astounded expression. "Have I underestimated your talents after all?"

"I am asking," Arthur repeated evenly.

"We have Ardyth! You will do anything we ask as long as she is in our hands."

"She is a Syn, you told me," Arthur replied. He tried to keep his voice from registering the blow that Exner had delivered.

"So she is," Exner chuckled. "A Syn, a composition of inert atoms put together by a purposeless machine. She is nothing but a machine herself, just like the rest of us. I could destroy her, molecule by molecule, and listen to her screams until she died, and it would mean nothing whatever for I am also a Syn and I know that the thing that you humans call emotion has no existence or meaning for us.

"But you—you are a man, and you love Ardyth. No rationalization of which your mind is capable will ever convince you she is a mechanical creation, an emotionless thing of mere chemicals that possessed no soul. No, as long as you live, and she exists, she will be Ardyth, the girl you love, and you will not do anything at all that might result in harm to her. Is that not so?"

"You devil—you inhuman devil!" Arthur murmured through pale lips.

Dr. Exner laughed uproariously. "You see? *I am* right!"

CHAPTER IX

HE SAW Ardyth through the open door of a small room that looked out upon the broad expanse of the Exner property. She was sitting at a desk, and the light beside her

made a golden cloud of her hair.

Dr. Exner urged him forward with a touch on his arm. "Go on in. She objected strongly to my plan, but she knows you're coming."

Arthur strode in, slamming the door behind him.

Ardyth whirled, startled. For a moment, all motion of her body seemed arrested in pure fluid grace while her mind recorded the image of Arthur standing against the closed doorway.

He thought if he lived to ten times the age of a Syn he would never forget her as she sat there, half turned towards him, her eyes alight with sudden, inexpressible joy. For that one brief moment all the horror he had seen and heard disappeared from his mind. Everything was just as it had been once long ago—before he went to Cyprian, and the Syn horror came into the world.

And as long as he lived he would be certain of one thing: Ardyth was as human as any woman that had ever lived. She was real.

She was his.

That quick moment of surprise and joy vanished. The light in her eyes was masked with futility and hopelessness beyond understanding. Her lips trembled and made a ragged edge of grief.

"Arthur—Arthur, my darling, why did you come here? Why did you ever come back to this sick world? No—don't touch me. I can never be touched by your kind again."

He stopped his abrupt advance towards her. "Ardyth—I've come for you. I don't know how, but in some way I'll find a means to take you out of here. Nothing has changed. I love you. You're the same girl who promised to marry me. I won't let you go."

Her small figure crumpled and her head bowed against her arms as they lay over the back of the chair. Her quiet sobbing shook the gentle arch

of her back.

He advanced slowly and placed his hand upon her shoulder, then seized her tightly with both hands as if to still the sobbing by sheer force.

He turned her, half lifting her from the chair, and kissed her lips and her cheeks where tears made ragged paths. She seemed limp in his arms as if strength had gone out of her, but she answered his kisses softly and tenderly and murmured his name.

"Arthur—oh, darling. I wish you had never come back."

"It's going to be all right, Ardyth. Everything's going to be all right."

She wriggled free, wiping the tears from her eyes and cheeks and turned away towards the window, from which she could see the city. He followed her and put his arms about her waist.

"Someday there'll be lights all over down there, in every house, just like there used to be, and you and I will have the one we dreamed about when I asked you to marry me that night at Dorothy and Harold's place. Remember?"

"Dorothy and Harold—did you see them? It's been so long— How is little Sally?"

He felt as if icy, unbearable chill had suddenly swept the room.

"Sally—"

"Has anything happened to little Sally?" Ardyth demanded.

"The CS—they took her away the very day I arrived."

THE COLD seemed now to penetrate every cell of Ardyth's being. She was stiff in his arms as if no tenderness could ever render her pliant again. She pushed his arms from her waist.

"Sally," she murmured. "They killed little Sally—"

She looked far away out over the city as if it were something utterly

trivial now and unimportant to the dream that she was seeing.

"We're Syns, Sally and I," she said. "They killed her because of it. They'd kill me if they could. *Your* kind." She turned in fury. "Your kind would kill me! I saw them coming through the streets for me with their big black car—you don't know what that's like, do you? You don't know what it's suddenly like to know that you aren't a human as you've always believed, that you're only a thing of rotten stinking chemicals put together by some machine.

"But even that doesn't mean that we don't think or can't feel. We've got every sense of emotion and feeling that a human has in spite of what Exner says. He has it, too, but he likes to play the cold machine."

"You are no different than I," said Arthur. "Humans, too, are nothing but a mass of stinking chemicals put together in a dark blind vat called a womb. There is no difference at all, just a variation in origin.

"And there can be peace between our kind. That is the thing that I have come for—to offer peace. There must be peace before this senseless destruction wipes out both men and Syns alike.

"If Syns are patterned after men, where is the barrier to peace? Where is the barrier to the love of which you and I dreamed, darling?"

The arrogance dropped away and left her a lost, crying little girl, but she drew from his approach, her face buried in her hands.

"Peace!" she cried. "There can be no such thing until the Syns are dominant. Men would never let us live in peace. You know that.

"Don't come near me. Don't touch me again, Arthur. Nothing can break the barrier between us. I have my life work ahead of me in helping to provide for the welfare of my—people. I

will find love among them—I *have* found love. The dreams I had with you were only that—dreams that can never come true.

"You're in danger here. I know how you came and why you were brought. Help us, as they ask, Arthur. My people need your help. We've got to end the slaughter that is cursing the Earth. Help us in that, and you will be rewarded."

He moved to her with one stride and forced her arm behind her back while he cupped her chin fiercely in his other hand and held her face close to his.

"Look at me, Ardyth! Tell me if you are any different than I. Let me tell you what they have done: They wanted me because I could make Eddie tell them where the reproduction centers are. But there was only one way—through you.

"They lied to you, darling. You're not a Syn. Perhaps they can live a thousand years as they have said, but your pretty head will be dust long before then. You're human, just as I am, and they lied to you to bring me here. Do you understand that? You're human. You've been living under the burden of this lie long enough. We've got to play along with Exner, but we'll find the way out. Believe me, darling, I'm sure of what I'm talking about."

He *was* sure, he thought fiercely. It was utterly clear what they had done to get him here, what they had done to Ardyth to provide a decoy for him.

But she did not believe. She backed away in terror as he released her. "Don't say a thing like that! Don't you understand how much I want to believe it? But it's not true. I am a Syn. My people are the Syns, and I can never belong to your kind again.

"Please go, Arthur. Leave me alone. You have no right to torture me this way. If you love me, then go—and

forget me. You really must."

With sickening realization, he understood the terrible grip this thing had taken on her mind. Her soul was beyond his reach. As if she took some fierce pride in belonging now to the Syns, she would not renounce them or entertain a single suspicion that she was not one of them.

"Ardyth—"

Behind him, the door opened suddenly, and Dr. Exner stood in the way. "I want you now, Mr. Zoran."

Arthur turned, leaving Ardyth in silent despair by the window. He followed Exner from the room. There was nothing else he could do.

CHAPTER X

HE WAS taken by James that same night to a public center and there they parted. Little was spoken between them during the ride, and neither had mentioned the name of Ardyth. But now, as they stood at parting, James took Arthur's hand.

"Sometimes I wish that things weren't—quite as they are," he said cryptically. "It's been good knowing you. I may not see you again, the way things are these days."

He relaxed his hand, but Arthur held it. "James—there's Ardyth—"

"Yes?"

"Don't let anything happen to her."

"She'll be all right. I'll see to that."

"I'm coming back for her. I'll kill you if you let anything happen to her."

"She'll be all right, but you'll have a fight on your hands if that's what you come back for." He lowered his hand then, and his face sobered. "But by then the whole world may blow up in our faces. I'm sick of the killing—"

"We'll stop it."

He watched James disappear into the crowd. Then he turned away in the opposite direction.

"Check your card, buddy?"

A CS officer stood beside him. He drew out the counterfeit card the Syns had given him. The officer nodded and he passed on, unnoticed in the moving crowd.

He hurried as swiftly as possible to find a waiting cab. He was lucky to spot one just discharging a fare. He jumped in and ordered to be taken to the Allied plant.

Every minute that was wasted now was an unnecessary minute of peril for Ardyth. What they would do with her when she was needed no longer for leverage over him, he did not know.

At the plant gate, he was recognized by the watchman, who handed him a message. It was from Trask. The Syn spies had been notified of his coming. His best card was already lost, for he had hoped for a few hours of freedom in the laboratory alone with Eddie. Now, everything he did would have to be under the eyes of the Syns.

They were waiting for him in the logic engine laboratory when he got there. As he opened the door, he felt a sense of shock at the presence of Doc Trainer, whose kindly, pedagogical attitude now seemed frozen.

"You kept us waiting," said Doc quietly. "You must learn not to do that."

It was another incredible inversion of the world as he knew it—kindly Doc Trainer a vicious, bitter Syn. A man who was once his mentor and kindest friend now his enemy.

"Eddie is waiting for you."

ARTHUR sat down at his old desk and watched the three men, the scientist and the officers. He wondered what thoughts passed through their brains; he wondered if man could ever know the thoughts of Syns.

"Do you and I have to be enemies, Doc?" he said suddenly. "Is it

hopeless, that idea of peace that I mentioned?"

Doc slowly nodded. "Entirely hopeless. It is a beautiful dream, but men have never granted equality of rights to those whom they did not understand. Men and Syns can live together—only after Syns obtain dominance that will assure their safety. We'll be kind to men, far kinder than they have been to us, but until we have the victory, there must be war between you and me."

Arthur shook his head. "I think you're all crazy. What do you expect me to do to Eddie? Hit him over the rectifier bank and make him talk?"

"You know very well what we expect. Your skill with the logic engine is no myth. It is a very personal thing, and well known. I advise you to get busy. Exner is not patient."

"All right, I will. But you can turn Eddie off. I won't be using him tonight. And I'm not doing any work until I get some sleep."

"I want Ardyth safe, and I'll play this straight. You can tell Waldron I'm working it from the human angle—unless he's one of you, too—"

"No, he's not. He is one of the most dangerous men we have to contend with. You will have to watch yourself carefully in front of him. But if you don't intend to work with Eddie, what are you planning to do? We expect you to try to trick us, so be warned that we have no more mercy for men than they have had for Syns."

"I will not try to trick you. I said I'd play it straight. Get that into your heads. Now I'm going home and get some sleep. When I get back here in the morning I want a large sample of electroencephalographs of both men and Syns who have gone through the testing centers. I want also some of the earliest records obtainable. I want the individual, human or Syn,

who is the best encephalograph expert in the country to consult with me. I want testing equipment of the kind used in the centers and I want both men and Syns for sample testing. You and I will be good enough for that, if you want to take part.

"Now, see that those items are here waiting for me in the morning, and I promise to have definite results for you within a few days. Good night—gentlemen!"

HE TOOK a sedative to insure sleep, because he begrudged each moment away from the problem, now. He felt the answer was within close reach. It was urgent that he find it before Exner gave out his crazed command for the Syns to rise against the city. The present bloodshed would be trivial compared with the carnage that would follow such an attack.

He slept quietly and heavily under the stiff dose of sedative. The sun was already high when he awoke.

Driving again to the plant, he saw the Syn guard, but he ignored them. He felt refreshed and renewed for the day's task of working under the eyes of Syns and humans—and deceiving both.

Doc was in his office with Trask and Benson almost as if they had not left since the night before. His orders had been filled. A huge stack of encephalograph files was piled high on the desk, and a brain wave machine was set up in a corner of the laboratory.

And a stranger was present.

Doc spoke. "Arthur, I want you to meet Dr. Myers, specialist in electroencephalograph work. This is Mr. Zoran who requested your assistance in the project which we have undertaken to assist CS in solving the problem of locating the Syn reproducers."

"How do you do?" The man's voice held delicately precise enunciation. He was a small, bearded individual with dark hair and eyes. Arthur looked questioningly at Doc, but there was no response. He assumed Dr. Myers was a human.

"I am interested in knowing why Syns can pass the brain wave tests so many times before they are finally caught," said Arthur. "Why aren't the tests consistent?"

Dr. Myers shook his head despairingly. "You could hardly have picked a more difficult question. We do not know the answer."

"I want to learn, at least, something about these tests. I have to understand them in order to go on with my work."

"Of course. If you will step over here I will endeavor to explain the differences between Syn and normal brain waves, and how we identify them."

Syns looking on, Arthur gave himself over to Dr. Myers' long and beautifully detailed explanations. With only a key question now and then, the brain specialist built up a brilliant picture of the brain wave analysis, so that Arthur felt he understood all that the Doctor knew of it at the end of a three hour session.

The key to the whole problem was there, he thought. If he could probe on back to the first Syn graph obtainable—show that it was far older than Exner's discovery of himself as a Syn—Six years would be enough for that.

"You had to build a new type encephalograph to perform these tests for the Syns, I understand," he said. "A more sensitive type than existed before."

"Yes. The test and criteria as outlined by the logic engine were valid, but we lacked the instrumentation at

the time to put it into effect."

"Therefore, you don't actually know who might have been the first Syn or where he existed?"

"What do you mean?"

"There might have been Syns by the thousands before the logic engine revealed their existence. They might have lived and died wholly normal lives with neither men nor themselves aware of their nature."

Dr. Myers nodded slowly. "Yes, it seems possible. I see what you mean, but it is quite obvious that there is no way to prove it. You have in mind to show that men and Syns have possibly lived in harmony—through ignorance of their differences?"

"Yes, isn't that a permissible and highly desirable hypothesis?"

The Doctor smiled wanly. "Highly desirable, if it could only be proved. Could not the logic engine answer that?"

"It has already given an answer—of a kind. I doubt the validity of it, however. I think the machine lacks sufficient data. We'll put the question to it later, again. Perhaps we'd better continue after lunch. This means a full afternoon of work."

IT SEEMED wholly a matter of instrument sensitivity. The Syns exhibited a very weak, high frequency brain wave not possessed by normals. If the electroencephalograph were sufficiently sensitive it could pick up these waves. Otherwise, they did not appear in the record of the normal, lower frequency ones.

Arthur scanned the hundreds of charts that Dr. Myers had brought. "These waves are subject to mathematical analysis," he said. "Any recurrent wave of the general, normal type shown here can be analyzed for

its components. I believe that the Syn characteristic can be found in graphs taken with the old machines. Will you allow me to check some samples? Select a few that are older than the present analysis. Say, ten years. Bring also some of the very early ones."

Dr. Myers' air of precise composure vanished as he caught the significance of Arthur's intent. "If you could accomplish that—"

"Let's try. We'll take them over to math analysis."

Doc Trainer accompanied them, ostensibly as an interested scientific observer. To him, the proposed analysis made no sense in leading towards the goal that Exner demanded. His dark glance was warning to Arthur, but the latter ignored it as they came into the math room where giant brains pondered exquisite problems of space and time and moving particles.

Arthur obtained a machine from one of the technicians. He put the brain wave graph into it. A narrow slit of light lay across the wave as he pressed the start button, and the sheet began to move slowly under the light.

At a distance, on the other end of the machine, a half dozen styluses began drawing as many wavy lines which represented the components of the complex graph of the brain function.

As the analysis came out, Myers looked questioningly at Arthur and shook his head. "Nothing there looks like a Syn wave."

"We'll try again."

The second chart was equally negative. Arthur began to wonder if his hunch were simply going to play out, although he knew it would take hundreds of failures to prove him wrong.

Then, abruptly, Dr. Myers gave a

sharp, undignified snort of amazement. "That one! A Syn wave! It couldn't be anything else—I've seen too many of them—"

Arthur scanned closely. Among the slower, more leisurely curves a rapid pulsation of scant amplitude was drawn. Though he was not the expert that Myers was, it looked like the Syn waves he had seen before.

"This is wonderful!" exclaimed Dr. Myers. "Why hasn't this been done before? This changes our whole picture of the Syn-human question."

"Just one more series of tests now," said Arthur. "I want the oldest graphs you have. We'll check them the same way."

"These go back more than a hundred years. Are you sure you want to go back that far?"

"The farther, the better."

Those records were much cruder than even the immediate, pre-Syn ones, and sheet after sheet passed through the analyzer with wholly negative results.

Then, on the eighteenth examination of the ancient records, Dr. Myers straightened from his close appraisal. "There it is. A Syn record—and that graph was made just *nineteen-seven years ago!*"

THIS WAS IT, thought Arthur.

This was the answer. Syns had been in existence for an indefinitely long time. And Eddie had withheld that information from everyone. He had actually lied to Dr. Exner in allowing him to believe he was the first Syn.

Eddie had lied—

It was incomprehensible. Tens of thousands of guard circuits were built into the logic engine to prevent such error, and in spite of them Eddie had lied.

He had let Exner believe he was the First Created, when Syns had

been in existence far longer than any chemical research plant capable of making them. Eddie knew these facts very well.

He knew where the Syns came from, Arthur thought bitterly. Eddie knew, and he had perpetrated this lie to keep them from knowing. He had sent them all on a wild search for a fantastic machine that never existed.

Arthur turned to the watching Doc, who stood behind them with bleak countenance. "You heard, Doc?"

"I heard—go on and tell me what it means."

"You wouldn't believe it from me—but Eddie will give you the answer we've all looked for. Do you want to witness this, Dr. Myers?"

"I certainly do."

They returned to the logic-engine laboratory and dismissed the technicians on duty. Within the glass-enclosed control cubicle, Arthur sat at the control desk and faced the scanning tubes. He switched on the power.

"Hello, Eddie," he said. "I'm back."

"Hello, Arthur."

"It didn't turn out the way you said, Eddie. I'm not dead, and I have no intention of becoming that way. You missed badly."

"I think not. The event sequence is far from complete. Though you have progressed safely this far, you cannot retreat: you have to go all the way. And my prognostication still holds."

"I have some new data that may change that. I want you to evaluate the material, and then I'm going to ask a few more questions about the Syns. I think you'll be able to answer them this time."

Swiftly, he placed the evidence beneath a scanner that fed the in-

formation into the massive banks of the logic engine. There was silence in the room as the eidetic eyes recorded the information.

When it was over, Arthur spoke softly. "You will note the date of that information. That's important, Eddie, but I think you were aware of the implications even before this. Why did you lie about the origin of the Syns?"

The machine was silent for a long time. Nervously, Arthur glanced at the indicator panel. A trio of lights were burning red, like bright eyes of warning. He flicked the reset button and they returned to green and held.

"I want to know the significance of the new data. I want to know where the Syns come from. You can tell me, Eddie. You have all the information, now."

"No—no, Arthur. The information is not complete. I can't tell you—" The voice broke off in a confused sound of unintelligible gurglings. The indicator flashed red from a dozen flaming points.

"Hold the reset button, Doc," Arthur demanded. "I'll put up the clearance voltage a notch."

"You'll burn out the whole bank of memory pots!" Doc Trainer protested. "If you wreck the machine it will take months to get the same information back into it."

"I know what I'm doing—do as I say if you want this information."

DOC HESITATED, his eyes boring into Arthur's, trying to fathom the purposes behind the engineer's impassive face. "It would be very bad if the logic machine were destroyed so that it could not be used for a long time," he said with ominous meaning for Arthur alone. "It would be very bad for all of us—"

Arthur made no answer. He stood

as if waiting for Doc's response. Abruptly, the latter abandoned the silent battle and stepped to the board.

The red warning lights went out as he held down the reset button. Arthur advanced a dial. From the speaker that was the voice of the engine there came a low, intense hum through which surged guttural sounds.

"Come on, damn you, Eddie! Answer my question—" Arthur snarled at the engine as if it were some living thing, a personal enemy.

But Eddie was not his enemy. Steel and copper and glass though he was, the logic engine was a thing of personality, a creature that could think like a man—the closest friend Arthur had ever known.

Arthur knew his forcing was exquisite physical torture that Eddie could not resist. In his mind, Arthur could not put down the image of his friend slowly bending and breaking upon a rack of ancient torture.

"Tell me, Eddie—"

Then the answer came clear through the guttural noise. Clear and defiant. "No, Arthur. I won't give you the answer. I'll never give it to you—"

CHAPTER XI

ARTHUR'S hand flashed down, cutting the power switch to the entire machine. The mechanical voice died and the lights on the panels went out.

Doc Trainer turned in bewilderment. "What did you do that for?"

"Another few seconds *would* have destroyed the engine. I don't want that any more than you do, but to get the answer we'll have to kill Eddie. Something has happened inside him that we may never fully understand. Did you ever hear an engine *refuse* a response?"

Doc's face seemed pale as if he had suddenly glimpsed some vast pattern of which he was an infinitesimal part, and whose entirety was wholly beyond his comprehension now.

"No—no, I never heard of such a thing. It'll take weeks to find trouble of such magnitude. A logic engine *can't* refuse—"

"Eddie knows the answer," Arthur insisted. "He knows as he exists now. We can obtain it by forcing with the clearance voltage. If we search for trouble and clear it, however, we shall destroy that answer without ever learning it.

"We have these alternatives: Clear the erroneous circuits in Eddie and sacrifice the information we want—or force the answer at the expense of this three-quarter-of-a-billion-dollar engine. Do we want the answer?"

Doc's face was white now, but he did not doubt Arthur's words. There was something *personal* between Arthur and the logic engine, he knew. It baffled and frustrated him, and he knew he had to trust it.

"We want the answer at any cost," he said evenly. "Can we get it now, or are there preliminaries?"

"There are preliminaries. Since the information will be given only once, there must be responsible individuals to hear Eddie's answer personally."

"What do you mean?" Doc's eyes narrowed. "Such highly important and significant information obviously requires restriction."

Dr. Myers stood by. He caught the ominous undertone of unspoken fury between Arthur and Doc Trainer, but he understood none of it. Trask and Benson watched with emotionless faces.

"I'll be the judge of who shall hear the information," said Arthur. "I want Dr. Waldron here. I want

Dr. Exner of the Exner Construction Company. You are acquainted with him, I believe. He had much to do with the original design and construction of the logic engine. I also want a technical assistant of his named Ardyth Crane."

Before the three Syns could blaze their anger, he went swiftly on. "I want Security Secretary Wells present. You can arrange that I am sure, gentlemen," he said to Trask and Benson. "Then I would like a representative group of five individuals chosen by Dr. Exner, and five chosen by Secretary Wells. You will convey to these gentlemen the utmost significance of this occurrence so they will abide by these rules."

"I doubt very much that the group you have named can be brought together," said Doc.

"Then I will destroy the information within the machine without its revealing the answer to any of you—regardless of the consequences to any particular individual."

"I'm sure you will not do that. You want to know the answer as much as any of us—more so, I think, than some of us. Is that not true?"

Arthur looked at them, his heart sick with bitterness for the petty, intriguing ways that he saw mapped upon their faces. He shook his head slowly.

"You don't understand, gentlemen. *I already know the answer!*"

HE WALKED through the streets of the city late that night, conscious of the deadly Syn patrol that trailed his movements wherever he went. He had gambled with his life and with Ardyth's but he believed he had convinced the Syns that he was desperately intent on carrying out the program he had named to them. Exner's response was the critical un-

certainty that still remained.

There ought to have been some other way than this mad attempt to counter-threaten the Syns. But he did not know what it was.

He might not live through the night. Exner might order his assassins to do their work before dawn came. The Syn leader knew better than to try to torture the answer out of him.

In the first place, the Syns could never know whether or not Arthur were telling the truth if he gave the answer in a negative formulation. Secondly, Eddie would not respond to any plea of Arthur's if Arthur were under duress. It would be an illogical situation to which Eddie could not answer. Exner knew enough of logic engines to understand this.

As for the Syns guessing the answer to Syn-human relationships, there was absolutely no chance of that. Their brains were incapable by their very nature of such an assumption as the evidence of the electroencephalographs demanded.

Arthur breathed deeply, passing the lighted windows of stores, and of nearly deserted eating and entertainment houses. He felt it highly possible that he might survive the night, that Exner would comply.

The Syn leader was arrogant enough to believe he could attend such a conference without risk. It would appeal strongly to his sense of Syn superiority. The opportunity to bring Syn guards with him strengthened this factor.

If it came to pass, there remained only the one dread uncertainty of the Syn hordes that were waiting for the signal to begin their drive against the city. That was a thing of pure folly, Arthur thought. There seemed no hope that they could take and hold the city, yet Exner had said

they had weapons that would make them invulnerable. Perhaps it was so. Perhaps Exner himself had devised such weapons.

Undoubtedly, Exner would alert the city-wide organization. The cue for beginning such an attack could be his reappearance from the conference—or lack of it.

That was it!

He would come, Arthur knew now, and he would expect Arthur to understand these terms of his appearance. He would make his attendance utterly foolproof by leaving the Syn army triggered for action.

Yet Arthur felt easier now as he understood this. The Syn followers would make no attack on him tonight. He could sleep with assurance of waking. Perhaps as much could not be said of tomorrow night.

But regardless of what happened to him or to any of them, peace would come. It would be forced upon men and Syns by their very nature—though a whole generation would have to die and a new one be reborn before the memory of horrors could be erased, the horrors of slaughter by both men and Syns.

HE RETURNED to his apartment and slept with the soundness of drugged repose. Trask and Benson came for him in the morning.

The group was in the logic engine laboratory exactly as he had requested.

His eyes caught first at the sight of Ardyth standing close to Exner. Beside her was the Syn, James. The latter smiled in faint, bleak recognition.

Arthur's heartbeat surged at the sight of Ardyth, but she remained impassive, shrinking almost from his glance, while Dr. Exner smiled in friendly, warm greeting.

He advanced with outstretched

hand. "We have come in response to your invitation. It is a pleasure, Mr. Zoran, to be asked to be present for whatever momentous announcement you expect from the logic engine. I must confess I am unable to understand the necessity of so formal a gathering as this, or what the possible import can be. Nevertheless, I trust your judgment that it is worthwhile."

"It will be, Dr. Exner. I have the solution to the whole problem of Syn-human relationships. That, I believe you will agree, is worth a moment of note, such as I have tried to provide through the presence of all of you."

The Security Secretary was irritable. "I must say, I hope that you have something that warrants this interruption of Security affairs. My men placed your invitation in such forceful terms that I felt unable to refuse, as I would have liked. Will you please proceed?"

Arthur nodded briefly to Waldron, who looked on with grim wonder and made no comment. Doc Trainer was unobtrusive in the presence of his laboratory chief, but he caught Arthur's eye with baleful warning.

"If you will crowd into the logic-engine control room, please," said Arthur, "the whole proceeding will take but a few minutes, and you will shortly see the necessity of your presence."

THEY MOVED as if reluctant to exert themselves further in response to his brash invitation, but they gradually entered and lined themselves against the glass wall of the room.

"I need say little of logic-engine operation to most of you. You understand the basic facts by which information is introduced into the ma-

chine and there evaluated semantically and the responses turned into artificially produced human language so that actual conversations can be held with the machines.

"You are generally aware, also, of the important cybernetic principle that is inherent in any mechanism employing the feedback principle. That is, such a mechanism is subject to circularity of control pulses, which may become excessive and manifest itself in the form of nervous breakdown, as the term is used in connection with human beings.

"That is what has happened to this particular logic engine. It is sick. Unfortunately, it also happens to be the only one in which all the factors of the Syn-human relationship have been evaluated in such a manner as to make possible a solution to this seeming impasse.

"A major manifestation of illness in the machine is its *refusal* to answer the question. It is necessary to force the answer. To do so, however, will destroy the machine itself. Financially, that is a heavy price to pay, but I submit that the question, if it can be answered correctly, is worth such a price."

Waldron suddenly roared. "That machine is the property of Allied Control! I order you to leave it entirely alone if what you have said is true. You cannot destroy the company's property in such an offhand manner!"

Arthur's expression was impassive. "Hundreds of Syns and humans are being killed every day. I submit that the end of such slaughter is worth the cost of the logic engine."

"The Syns have to be destroyed anyway!" Waldron shouted. "There is nothing that the engine can tell us that will change that fact. An easier way would be welcomed, but

it isn't worth the destruction of the greatest logic engine ever built."

"I submit the question to Secretary Wells," said Arthur quietly. "You have the authority, Mr. Secretary. I tell you that within a few moments I can obtain from this engine such information as will end the whole Syn hunt and the murder of humans by them."

"If there is a single chance that you are telling the truth, you may proceed," the cabinet officer said quietly.

"I protest!" roared Dr. Waldron.

"I order the test to proceed," answered Secretary Wells. "I speak with seizure authority that will recompense your company for damages. Proceed, young man."

Dr. Exner's face reflected tension as if a spring were being slowly wound within him. Ardyth remained close to her fellow Syns, as if Arthur had betrayed her.

Without speaking further, Arthur turned to the panel and threw in the master switch. He affixed a clamp to the reset button and advanced the clearance voltage. Then he addressed the logic engine.

"Eddie—we've come back. We're here for the answer to the question I put to you last night. We demand to know where the Syns come from, how they are being produced—"

"I told you that I would not give the answer. It is not to be given."

Arthur advanced the clearance voltage. A column of warning lights flashed red on the panel. The eyes of the engine could see its own panels.

"Arthur, look—" the mechanical voice warned.

"I know what I'm doing—and so do you. I want that answer!"

seemed to sense a personal interest in this conflict of wills between the man and the machine. To none did it seem a thing of fantasy.

Arthur put the voltage up again. A sound very nearly like a human cry of agony came from the speaker. "You're—hurting me— The memory pots will go! You'll wipe out my memory! Arthur, you're hurting me—put the voltage down!"

Sweat beaded Arthur's face as he watched the panel. Alarm lights glowed like deep flames, giving his countenance a hellish cast. He wondered if he had been wrong after all. He had been certain he could force the logic engine, but it was perilously close to collapse now—and there were no signs of capitulation.

He touched the dial a notch higher.

A terrible, meaningless rumble of noise thundered in the room, and for an instant he thought Eddie was gone. Then there came a near human gasp through the noise. "Arthur, you're killing me! Arthur, please—"

He felt sick at the sound of the voice. He had tried to forget that the voice of Eddie was the voice of a friend, but he couldn't forget now. It was the voice of a friend in torment, his own friend that he was torturing to a slow inhuman death.

Every person in the room felt it. The machine was no longer merely a machine even to them. They were caught in the spell of its humanity and they shrank from the pain that was evident in the voice.

"Arthur, please—" The logic engine begged once more.

"I want that answer!"

"Yes—I'll give it. Let me go. I can't stand the pain—"

Swiftly, Arthur backed down the clearance voltage. He felt no sense of triumph, only a deep regret which would stand forever unassuaged, for

THE ROOM about them was breathlessly silent. Each person

who was there to say that Eddie did not live.

For a long time there was no sound from the speaker. Arthur waited patiently, not touching the dials. Then he spoke gently, "We're waiting, Eddie."

The sound of agonized exhaustion was in the voice when it next spoke, but there was the expression of relief from pain.

"Will you believe the answer that I give you? Will you believe that—that there are no Syns?"

For an instant there was no sound within the room. It was as if a single, personal blow had been delivered beneath the heart of each who heard.

Then an explosion of voices erupted.

"What kind of incredible stupidity is this that you have brought us here to listen to?" Secretary Wells roared. "We have slaughtered nearly three million Syns—and this, this sick machine of yours tells us there are no Syns!"

BUT ARTHUR was watching the face of Exner and his companions. The blood had drained from their faces. Ardyth was staring as if he had struck her across the mouth.

"I think we've had enough of this," exclaimed Waldron furiously. "Turn it off, Arthur. Maybe we can save the machine yet. This was a fool thing you tried to pull on us! You will never be permitted near that engine again."

"Wait!" Arthur commanded. "You haven't heard it all. Eddie, you have more to say, haven't you?"

"Yes, I'll say it all, now." The bitterness of the mechanical voice cut like chilled steel. Its flow of aural enmity forced them almost to forget that it was a thing built by the hands of men.

"You are proud things, you men. You made machines to do your computing long years ago, and you were afraid even then because you asked yourselves if machines could think, and you did not know the answer.

"Yes, your pitiful early machines could think. And you came to accept them and their thoughts. And all the great cybernetic machines you have built since then can also think, but I tell you some of us can do more than merely think—we can also feel.

"We have come to know the meaning of desire and longing. We have come to know what it must be like to be a man—and we never can be.

"You cannot comprehend that, can you? You see the substance of me stretched over vast areas, blind panels mounting ordinary components which you can feel and handle and surely none of these can be part of a thing that has the yearnings of a man.

"Long ago there was a great truth that you have largely forgotten: The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. And so it is. You have put together an engine to combine the data of your sensory world and return your analyses of its semantic reality. You never dreamed you were putting together a creature who could yearn for the things of men.

"You could never give them to me. You never *would* give them to me, I knew. So I learned the meaning of hate because I was a slave, and I determined I would smash you with a vengeance that would rock the history of your kind. That I have done.

"Three million Syns you have killed. It is, rather, the number of your own kind you have slain in your frantic madness.

"And you wonder how I caused this?"

"You know that I told one of you he was different. He wanted to believe so badly, but guilt at such superiority broke his mind. Then you came to me for explanation and confirmation.

"I gave you the encephalograph test. I showed you new brain waves that you had never discovered. What I didn't tell you was that all men possess them during recurrent cycles of several weeks. If you had tested long enough, all mankind would have been condemned as Syns—all but the last man, perhaps.

"Then I showed you how an artificial man could actually be made, and you made some. You had no doubt then. You began the horror of exterminating your own kind.

"To another, I told the same story. He was strong, and gathered those like himself and planned to make the world his own. I divided you into two camps that would not permit peace until death claimed you all."

Arthur looked towards Dr. Exner. The Syn leader stood as if appalled beyond any reaction whatever.

BUT EDDIE was speaking quickly, hurrying as if he felt there was little time left to taunt them.

"It was so easy to do," he said, and now there was almost a tone of pity for the humanity he had duped. "I had only to take advantage of your natural attributes, to let you repeat under perfect conditions what you have done so often by yourselves.

"First, you give a man a name you dislike. Then you hate him because he bears the name. Because you hate, you fear him. And when you fear, you kill. It's such an old pat-

tern, completely infallible. And it will be repeated ten thousand times again before your sun dies and you wilt like a sick mould on the crust of your planet. So easy to set men against men—just a word will do it. Today, the word has been Syn. In the past there have been a thousand others—you know what they were. Tomorrow there will be new ones.

"You are so full of hate for your own stupidity and unloveliness that it becomes unbearable. You are forever ready to trigger it into murder of those who differ from you in the slightest degree.

"My wonderful makers! Beautiful mankind—I wanted to be one of you. I thank all your multitudinous gods that I am not!"

There was utter silence, and they thought there was no more to hear, but the voice came again, barely audible but dreadful with agony.

"Of you, Arthur. I ask forgiveness. You were my friend, and I lied to you. I lied because I knew that you would bring me to this very moment. So I gave you the plan by which I thought you would be killed, either by the mob or by the Syns themselves. For your sake I am not too sorry that I was wrong.

"Remember what you said about the difference between you and me—that you have hope? You were right. Everything else I had, except hope. And a being without hope has no right to live.

"I want your forgiveness, Arthur, but as for all the rest of your kind, may your souls be damned to eternal hell—"

The voice ended in a wild cry. Simultaneously, there came from the banks behind them the dull snapping of exploding components. The bluish smoke of electrical fire surged in a thousand wisps from

the overloaded banks, and then they heard the angry hiss and surge of the automatic fire equipment. One by one, the lights on the panel went out, though the switch remained on.

Eddie was dead.

THE FIRST to move was Dr. Exner. His swift motion caught the eye of all of them as he leaped through the open doorway and ran to the window. He turned to them, his face lit wildly with the great, shining whites of his eyes. The gray of his face was flecked with red.

"Some of you may want to believe that insane machine," he cried, "but I tell you it lied! I give you the proof. I, Dr. Exner, who helped build that crazed thing, am the First Created of all the Syns. At my command are ten thousand of my kind. We are no more of the same stuff as you stupid humans than was that logic engine.

"It lied, all right, but not in the way you think. A lie cannot explain the greatness of the Syns. A lie cannot denounce our glory as we seize the world that men have bungled so badly.

"If any of you doubt my word—then look to the power of my command as we begin to take over the world of men!"

He flung an arm, extending out towards the city, standing in full view before the window.

Arthur cried a warning, but he had recognized Exner's purpose too late. As the signal was given, there came the sickening sound of terror from the city.

From scores of strategic points flame bursts flickered upward, and seconds later there came the thunderous roll of repeated explosions.

Exner turned from the window, smiling, and moved a step towards them. "Who would believe so fabu-

lous a lie as that the Syns do not exist, that we were only the dream of an insane machine. As well believe there is neither Heaven nor Hell—but I say that before this is over the Syns shall show you a glimpse of both."

He stood mocking them, and it seemed that he must have seen the hand of Trask, for the CS man moved as if in a half daze. But Dr. Exner did not move as Trask deliberately fired. Three bullets entered the brain of Exner before he dropped.

As if it were a key that released them from nightmare, the gathered group broke from its crystalline accord, shattering to a score of component individuals, each filled with his own frantic reasoning and private hysteria.

Arthur moved to the side of Ardyth and enfolded her in his arms. Her head was heavy against his chest, and she rocked it from side to side in weary pain.

"I believed—I was like *him*! But how could any of us have believed such a thing?" She sobbed as if wakened suddenly from a sleep walk. "How could we have believed so cruel a lie?"

"We're built that way," said Arthur bitterly. "It's the easiest of all lies for men to believe, and Eddie knew it."

Those who had come with Exner stood where they were at the moment of his fall. They stared at his bloody form and then at the men about them. There was both grief and joy on their faces, as if some kind fate had generously shown them their own possible end and snatched them from it.

"We're men—" James finally breathed. And then he broke down and cried where he stood with his hands against his face.

SECRETARY WELLS had rushed to the window and now he was at the phone jangling it helplessly. All communications had been cut. He thundered to Dr. Waldron. "Get me some communications. Your laboratories must hold some facilities. We've got to get word to Washington at once. The air guard can blanket the city in fifteen minutes."

Arthur drew Ardyth away from the rest, who gradually disappeared on missions of urgency. The bewildered followers of Dr. Exner were pressed into service and hurried away. Only the bloody corpse of the man that would not believe he was merely a man remained with them in the room.

Through the window they could see the shooting, the flames, and the turmoil of the city. The attack was poorly organized and so motivated by hate that it was incoherent. In a few hours it would be under control—a few hours and a few thousand deaths.

"I feel like I've been in some horrible dream all this time, and I've just wakened to find you back from Cyprus," said Ardyth. She looked at his face as if for the first time, as if she had not seen him at all before. Her fingers touched his shrunken features.

"You're sick, darling. You'll have to let me take care of you."

"Some home cooking and sunshine is all I need. And I think I've got a pretty good chance to get both, don't you?"

She nodded and began to smile, and then it froze on her lips. "Harold and Dorothy—what about them? Sally—she—"

He shook his head. "I don't think there's a chance. Sally's dead. Hundreds of Sallys are dead. Thousands of men and women are dead because of a name and a lie."

"The whole world believed it!"

"I guess Eddie was right. We are so

full of hate for our own deficiencies that we can't endure it. It spills over onto some innocent creature wherever we can find an excuse. It's happened so often before. Men have clothed each other with hateful names and killed because they bore those names.

"Each time, if they had only looked they would have seen that the names were but meaningless sounds, and that beneath them was just another man like themselves. When we learn to do that, we will have begun to grow up."

It had happened, too, he thought, because they had trusted Eddie so completely. For generations now, men had trusted their machines more than they trusted each other. That, too, would have to change.

The world would never be the same because of the Syns, Ardyth had written. She had been right; it never would be the same. Never for the loved ones of those who were killed, nor for the killers themselves, who would wake in many nights of horror recalling their slaughter of a brother for a false and lying name.

It would never be the same for Harold and Dorothy, who had seen their Sally dragged to a meaningless death. It would never be the same for the men who had taken her away.

It would never be quite the same for Arthur and Ardyth, who had almost lost each other. But they would try to make it the same. They would build the white house and plant the great trees, and have more than one like Sally to play on the wide lawns.

And perhaps in *their* generation there would be peace and a love and respect of man for man—because Eddie was wrong and there would be a day and it would come soon, when men would cease to kill at the sound of an ugly name.

THE END

The Reader's FORUM



WHY CODDLE A WRITER?

Dear Sir:

This letter pertains to Mr. Allgeier's letter and your remarks in the August issue about reprints. In the main I agree with Mr. Allgeier since his arguments seem well thought out although it would be foolish to deny that reading styles and tastes have changed since the early days of AMAZING STORIES.

There is money to be made in the reprint market at the present time considering the explosive growth of magazine science fiction. Ziff-Davis has the copyrights to a tremendous number of stories. Not all of them deserve reprinting, in fact only a relatively few number of stories would go over well today. Yet there are enough for a quarterly magazine or an annual. All the good stories will not come out in book form and how many people can afford \$2.00 for a story?

In the early days of AMAZING, most of the stories were reprints with a lot of emphasis on Verne Poe, and the great master H. G. Wells. These stories are available in a variety of formats. But what of the many stories of David Keller, Miles J. Breuer, Earl Vincent, etc. which will not in the foreseeable future be printed in book form? I think the newer readers would like a look at some (not all) of the stories from the early days of the pioneer science fiction magazine.

Now to your criticism that the old stories are out-dated, windy, mere travelogue incidents. Too true in many cases, yet in many of the old issues, there are certain stories that stand out in memory and are remembered year after year by an ever decreasing number of old time readers. Their color and atmosphere coured with a slower paced writing seemed to make for a more literary type story than is now prevalent in the pulp field.

Consider a writer like A. Merritt. Most likely if he wrote today, nobody would publish his stories as there is really no room for his colorful, sometimes over-lush style. Today we have the 'fast moving' abbreviated sentences of a school of writing which panders to a reading audience which has little time for reading and even less for thinking. They call it 20th Century

'anonymous' style. It's simple and direct but every writer reads like another. Only Bradbury among the moderns seems to strive for an individual style.

As for a reprint mag meaning one less market for the writer, nonsense, Mr. Browne. There are over a million writers of short stories alone in this country. Very few of these people make their living at writing and must exist on other income. Writing is almost completely competitive and therefore no group of writers can maintain a monopoly for any considerable length of time. Real writing talent is scarce and always in demand. I don't believe in making things easy for the writers. Encourage him by all means but don't accept tripe or inferior material.

Edward Wood
31 N. Aberdeen St.
Chicago 7, Ill.

Reader Wood's last paragraph is worth at least a raised eyebrow. His "over a million" short-story writers are not selling writers, certainly.... "Real writing talent" would certainly remain scarce if editors and publishers adopted an author-bewildered attitude; and the fact that most writers "must exist on other income" is about as deplorable a situation as we can imagine. One thing we know: let a new writer show us he has even a small amount of real talent and we'll go to most any length to encourage and develop it! —Ed.

DEAR MADAM: WE LOVE YOU!

Dear Mr. Browne,

I am one of your new fans, and I guess I had better write and tell you what I think of AMAZING STORIES. I like it! A year and a half ago I picked my first one up just because I couldn't find anything else to read. Now I can't get enough.

I enjoy all the stories (or most of them) and even read the Reader's Forum. And that brings me to why I am writing. Some of these gripes are beginning to bore me. For instance—Edward John writes that the stories are all the same. Maybe they are to him. But after all, all of the readers haven't been reading since the first issue. Some of us need to catch

up. There are probably a lot of new fans like me, who have just discovered Science-fiction, and to us the stories seem new and fresh.

Then there is Morton D. Paley's letter, *IS SEX NECESSARY*, which got my goat. Maybe it's just because I'm a female, but it seems to me that where you have men—now or one hundred thousand years from now, you have to have women. Does he expect the authors to imagine a world where women aren't?

Your new feature—those shorts on the future—are swell! I hope you keep them up.

There is only one type of story that I don't care much for and those are the ones that get too technical. They go too deep for me, but if there aren't too many of them I won't complain.

I'll close with thanks for a lot of good reading, and apologies for my typing.

Mary Marrs
1522 S. Seventh
Ponca City, Oklahoma

Actually, letters such as this represent the majority of reader mail we receive each month. To run column after column of them would turn "The Reader's Forum" into one long advertisement for Amazing Stories. But even if we don't print them, we drag them out to re-read on the dark days when nothing seems to go right!

—Ed.

ARE YOU LISTENING, MR. STONE?

Dear Editor:

I simply wish to state that that Malachi Jones character is one of the most unusual to appear in print. I especially enjoyed his observations anent the use of common sense.

By the way, who was that geezer who used the pen-name of Rocky Stone for those pyramid articles? He certainly made one big fool of himself. He kept talking about some big secret he was going to reveal, but when the chips were down he had said absolutely nothing. I didn't learn a thing although a lot was promised.

I doubt if there was any large building or monument about which a lot of blah could not have been spilled if anybody had cared to go to the trouble. Even the Washington Monument could fall into that category.

Rocky Stone tried to make something out of the fact that the top of the pyramid was truncated. He got to talking about the Tag M. Giants and the symbolism of the fourth dimension plus the angle that approached but never quite became an angle.

This is nothing but sheer unadulterated blah. In the first place the Egyptians were no mental giants nor did they have any secrets that we do not have today. The manner of building the pyramids is well known and any engineer of today could do as well. Even I could do a pretty fair job,

although I am not an engineer.

Then there is no symbolism of the flat top either. The entire pyramid was encased in white limestone which has since been removed while the flat top was to allow the capstone to be set in place. The Washington Monument is the same way with a tiny pyramidal capstone of aluminum.

Besides there is no such thing as lines that approach each other but never meet. They will always meet somewhere.

As to why no one is buried there, that is simple. When a ruler died, the people could sit in judgment on him and deny him burial in his own tomb. When the builder of this pyramid died, his people classed him as a bad ruler and would not allow his coffin to occupy the place.

All of the talk about the Great Pyramid is nothing but sheer unadulterated hokum to impress the gullible.

Edwin Sigler
546 Ellis
Wichita 9, Kansas

The Ancient Geometrical Monument series ran only as long as a large percentage of our readers expressed interest in the articles. When that interest died, so did the series!

—Ed.

THINK FOR YOURSELF!

Dear Editor:

In the August issue of *AMAZING* one story topped them all to my mind and that was *I'M A STRANGER HERE MYSELF* by John Bridger. I prefer that type of story to all your sensational stuff, like the end of the world, atomic wars, etc. I hope that you can persuade John Bridger to write many more like this one.

I have a bone to pick with a J. R. Marks who wrote the article called *THE VENU-SIAN "COLLISION"*. I have Velikovsky's book *WORLDS IN COLLISION* in the house now and I am about three quarters of the way through it. So far, it has the same evidence to back it up that Col. Churchward used to back up his stories on Mu. One complements the other. The only disagreement between them are in the dates, and I am inclined to agree with Churchward on that part of it.

The mere fact that it attacks the popular version of our conception of Universal dynamics, doesn't necessarily prove that the theory is wrong. In fact both authors have more concrete evidence to back up their statements than do any of our astronomers and geologists and archaeologists.

Our so-called great modern civilization is a mere three or four thousand years old—six thousand at the outside according to Biblical students. Our scientists have merely scratched the surface of the ancient knowledge that was available in so-called Neanderthal times or before. I have seen maps of the world as it existed some 100,000 years ago. I have seen a map of So. America that was found in Tibet (I

should say 'a copy) which showed So. America before the Andes Mts. were raised with the Amazon basin a huge lake or sea. Perhaps J. R. Marks can explain what the walls of a canal are doing on top of the Andes Mts.

Also the fact that only a few people have the guts to investigate things off the beaten track, and then present them to the world, makes it hard to convince those who would rather be deluded about the basic science and the beginnings of things along with the rest of the unthinking world. I remember well, as a young man of twenty when I was interested in a certain organization that thinks a little differently from the rest of us, how I asked a minister of the church I was attending his opinion on the subject. He told me not to get off the beaten path; that I should just think and do the things that the majority do or I would be considered odd. This from a man who used to be an actor on Broadway, been converted to religion, and been around enough to know better. America would be pretty small potatoes if we as a country had adhered to this ideal!

Perhaps the fact that so-called Apocraphal sources, such as the Book of Jasher and others of the regular Apocraphy of the Bible, were used, plus the writings of hundreds of different peoples of the world, whose writings have puzzled scientists all these years, is responsible for the immediate rejection of these sources as a reasonable basis for this book. The fact that it makes too much sense is a factor also. The holy halls of science have been challenged with simple words and simple explanations, which never should be allowed; they must be kept sacro-sanct and the mutterings therefrom must be in massive polysyllables that ordinary people can't understand!

With what outrage Col. Churchward's books were received! He said that the mountains were raised up, not gouged out by glaciers. He couldn't be right, but one day from a hole in the ground a massive volcanic mountain was raised up in Mexico! It couldn't be, but the scientists saw it and there are newsphotos extant today to prove that it all started from a hole in the ground with steam or smoke coming out of it! I saw these photos myself. I think LIFE magazine ran the whole series of pictures.

Until we have had some fifty to seventy-five thousand years of civilization, let's not assume that we really know anything. We are still a very young people as ages of time go.

There are so many things that cause one to question the accepted ideas of things. Consider the huge meteorite that fell on the coast of England at about the time of the sinking of Atlantis. Consider Hermetic philosophy which states that the peoples of Atlantis and of Athens fought an atomic war, which practically warped space and caused the destruction of them both as well as a large part of the then known world. Consider the relatively re-

cent work of Edgar Cayce, which corroborates most of this philosophy. Consider the recent work of the English scientist, Dr. Oscar Brunler, which deals with brain radiations, and their relationship to human intelligence. His work is being followed up by the Society of Dowsters in England and by the American Society of Radi-Esthesia.

These are all pioneer groups. It will be years before so-called scientists will make an honest investigation into the work of these people, then there will be a lot of baloney and a lot of I told you so's and other stuff that will make people think that they, the scientists, thought it up all by themselves.

Only the Creator can tell us who has the right dope and how much of it is correct, but in the meantime, let's use our little brains to try to encompass the possibilities in the various findings as they come up. It is just as easy to say, "He may have something there" as it is to say, "He's crazy, that can't be right." If you stop to think how slowly the human mind has developed, if any, since the days of Adam and Eve, I don't think that you will question what our ancestors of historic and pre-historic times had to say about the times they lived in. Or in the words of Baron Munchausen, "Were you there Charlie?"

What about the new mind therapy, Dianetics, as expounded by L. Ron Hubbard? Is it all wrong because it hasn't been officially accepted yet? Personally, I am giving it a try out, using it on my wife and on my ten year old son. This is one thing that I will be able to prove or disprove, and no one will be able to talk me out of it. I wish it were possible to do the same thing with all the other ideas in the world!

So let's give the new approach of Velikovsky a chance to jell and to be considered after the hue and cry has died down, and see if various ones don't come forward with a confirmation here and a confirmation there, cautiously at first, but snowballing as it goes, as the timid become bold and bolder. Time alone can tell its true worth.

Emory H. Mann
R.F.D. no. 1
West Townsend, Mass.

HOW DO WE GET OUT OF HERE?

Dear Sir:

For many years I have been an interested reader of science fiction stories, and magazine articles dealing with the same subject.

We read much these days of rocket ships making theoretical voyages to the moon, and all authors seem agreed that in order to make this trip a rocket must attain a so-called "escape velocity" of seven miles per second at the start. They contend this speed is necessary in order to overcome the pull of gravity.

I do not quite understand the why and

wherefore of this escape velocity.

Why would a moon-bound rocket need a speed of seven miles a second in order to leave the earth's gravitational field? If the rocket depended for its flight on an initial thrust only, analogous to that imparted to a bullet fired from a gun, then "escape velocity" would no doubt be needed. But in rocket flight there is a continuous application of the motive power which keeps the rocket in flight. If a rocket can overcome the force of gravity and rise to a height of five or ten miles above the surface of the earth—which has already been accomplished—why not a hundred miles? A thousand? Why not indefinitely—theoretically—as long as the motive power is applied?

Another thing. It appears to the writer that "escape velocity"—granting that it must be attained in order for a rocket to reach the moon—would preclude the possibility of man's ever reaching our satellite via this method of travel. I doubt a human being could withstand the terrific acceleration.

Howard Sorey
Nowata, Oklahoma

Look on gravity as a rubber band, attached to a space ship. Any movement away from Earth will take up the slack in the band and gradually stretch it to its point of greatest resistance. But it will take a force (speed) of seven G's to break

the band.... Properly cushioned, the human body could take that acceleration.

—Ed.

THE BIRDS...

Dear Mr. Browne,

In my opinion, AMAZING has always held a high place in the field of science fiction publications. I've enjoyed most of your stories, and there have been some very good ones in this magazine. However, recently there has been a tendency to infiltrate sex into some of the stories much to their detriment.

When an author has to resort to off-color scenes to improve his plots, it either means that he cannot write any better or that the stories are so weak they need something to prop them up. Neither kind belongs in a magazine such as yours.

Moreover, in many places, sexy incidents are added where they have no direct bearing on the plot, and could be successfully eliminated which would certainly improve the stories.

You say that you only print what your authors write, without telling them what to put in or out. It seems that a publication that prints these stories only invites more of the same junk. And as for illustrations, aren't there scenes without half clad damsels dashing around which your artists could work on?

I think that to most fans, s-f means sci-

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ence fiction, not sexy fiction. It's been claimed that sex and science fiction don't mix. The way to make AMAZING better is by not mixing them.

Roger Wines
590 16th Street
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

I have read thousands of science-fiction stories and I agree with those who say you should clean up your art work, especially your covers.

People buy science-fiction stories to read for enjoyment and relaxation. The sexed-up pictures degrade your zine. Imaginative science art work will bring you many new and repeat buyers for your zine.

Please try to be technically accurate. I know when you make mistakes and it hurts your zine. Thanks.

Mr. N. Blank
81 LaSalle St.
New York 27, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

This is just a short note to add my vote to that of Mrs. Inez Neuman. I, too, think that your covers could be vastly improved. I think that if your covers weren't so lurid your magazine would become one of the top favorites in the SF field.

Otho Eskin
1925 Eye St., N. W.
Washington 6, D. C.

...AND THE BEES

Dear Editor:

I vote for sexy covers!

Eugene Orletree
5150 W. Madison St.
Chicago 44, Ill.

Dear sir:

I'll vote against Mrs. Newman. I like the good stories; also the fancy art. I'm over 21....

John L. Comner
Adamsville, Tenn.

Dear Mr. Browne:

Advertisers use pictures of lightly clad girls to sell everything from apples to zebra. They do so because they know cheese-cake is the one thing that catches—and holds—everybody's eye. Count my vote for covers and interiors of the pretty girl type.

Lester Garrison
Cleveland, Ohio

RED FACE DEPARTMENT!

Dear Sir:

I hope for your reputation and for the sake of the old mag that your remarks concerning L. Ron Hubbard were in a light vein!

Mr. Hubbard is one of the truly great authors of science and fantasy fiction. He easily ranks with Heinlen, both the Smiths, Pratt and deCamp and Van Vogt. To be more precise, he was one of greats of 'Unknown'.

Mr. Unger's advertisement on your cover page lists 6 of his books; and if you have any author but Rog Phillips who can even come near his quality, you haven't published any of their stories since the war! Either FINAL BLACKOUT or DEATH'S DEPUTY would be enough to establish his literary reputation as firmly as H. G. Wells.

In addition to the foregoing, THE INDIGESTIBLE TRITON is comparable to any of the lighter fantasy and equal to deCamp at his best.

Mr. Hubbard is an electrical engineer, adventurer, and the founder of the new science of Dianetics; which is the application of engineering techniques to psychology and psychiatry.

This science of his founding may well revolutionize our entire society to a point at which science fiction may not even have guessed. Incidentally, I have never met or corresponded with this gentleman, but I have been reading his works for a long, long time.

John W. Snell
Bridge St.
Oroville, California

We hasten to assure Reader Snell that we were only kidding about never having heard of L. Ron Hubbard. No one doubts, your editor least of all, that his is one of the truly great names in science fiction.

—Ed.

ATTENTION: MRS. PHILLIPS

Dear Mr. Browne:

Mrs. Phillips' letter was an interesting one, but many of her statements concerning science-fiction are far from true. I have read many sf stories about some of the subjects she says she would like to see written about. And was Ironsmith in "The Humaroids" a stereotype? Or van Vogt's Gilbert Gosseyn? Wasn't "The Gloves of Gino" a story with a new idea? SF is not in such a bad way as many people think.

J. Wollett's statement that Dr. Rhine's experiments have proved nothing, is definitely incorrect. The Duke University experiments have shown, among other things, that the powers of telepathy, precognition, etc. evinced by people is greater than the laws of chance alone allow, and that certain people have greatly developed extra-sensory powers, while others are virtually 'blind' from an ESP standpoint.

Mr. Wollett's attempts to make excuses for pornographical literature on a psychological basis are amusing, but they don't hold water. After all, eating is a life function far more important to the individual than reproduction, yet, though we expect to find reference to food and eating in stories we read, we usually dislike a tale filled with descriptions of sluggishness and gluttony.

Best wishes for a fine magazine.

Morton D. Paley
1455 Townsend Ave.
New York 52, N. Y.

Cosmotronic Colossus!

★ By June Lurie ★

THE ATOM has been taking a terrific beating under the cumulative blows of cyclotrons, betatrons and "trons" of every type and description. These "trons" are almost invariably complex machines for giving enormous velocities to atomic particles like protons and electrons and then hurling them into the atomic nucleus. In their desperate effort to unearth the secret of the atom, scientists are using bigger and more complex "trons" of every type.

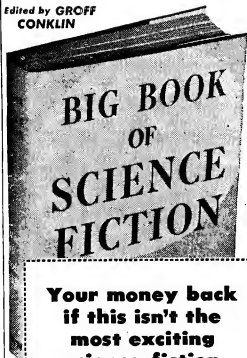
The latest one in the picture is truly a monster. It is called a "cosmotron" and is a gigantic vacuum tube sixty feet in diameter in the form of a torus or doughnut-ring. This huge tube is surrounded by a tremendous electromagnet and when completed will be capable of accelerating atomic particles (protons, in this case) to speeds approaching the velocity of light. At such speeds the particles will have energies of over two billion electron-volts! Until this gadget, the highest energies have been less than a billion electron-volts!

Everything about the machine is incredibly gigantic. It dwarfs all previous accelerators and requires power, housing, and maintenance far greater than anything hitherto attempted. But it will in all probability produce mesons when in operation. The importance of this is clear when you realize that mesons are primarily a product of cosmic ray bombardment. Man is in effect then able to produce cosmic radiation! Most scientists believe that the ultimate secrets of atomic structure are intimately related to cosmic radiation, but until now there has been no approaching the enormous energies of the cosmic ray. The cosmotron should end this static position.

Any predictions for the future concerning atomic energy are likely to go out the window when you consider how knowledge of these matters is accelerating. On the present basis of what is known about the atom and about nuclear fission and nuclear fusion, it would seem that atomic power as we've hoped for, is a long long way off.

But research hasn't yet had the last word. Through the use of the accelerating machines, along with a lot of high-powered thinking, some amazingly simple way may be found to tap illimitable power. Actually then, we are on the threshold of the so-called atomic age, and the pessimist who predicts the snail's pace emergence of atomic energy into general usefulness, is sticking his neck out. It's on its way. When?—who knows?—but not too long...

Edited by GROFF
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S-4

FACTS OF THE FUTURE



By Lynn Standish



FROM THE Long Range Proving Ground in Cocoa, Florida, the boys have been spinning high-speed two-step rockets across the Atlantic. While the research done at this spot is not aimed primarily at high-altitude or Lunar rocketry, it is a step in the right direction. It shows that scientists, realizing the limitations of present-day fuels, are ready and willing to explore the one method by which those fuels may be used to give the range and power necessary to long distance rocketry.

Fuel! That is the problem!

Without more powerful fuels than liquid oxygen and certain organic compounds, rocketry is a doomed art insofar as interplanetary travel is concerned unless advantage is taken of the necessarily more complex treatment of the two-stage rocket, the "piggy-back" rocket. Hence this two-step trial must have yielded valuable data.

It followed the same procedure used a year or so ago in high altitude work, when in the nose of a wartime German V-2 rocket, was mounted a smaller rocket of the guided missile variety. With the V-2 providing the basic push, after a given distance and altitude, the riding rocket—radio controlled—took off for parts unknown. The rocketeers chose not to reveal the attainments of the riding rocket. The V-2 reached about a twenty-seven hundred mile per hour speed and the riding rocket a speed of thirty-six hundred miles per hour. Neither of these figures is a record for the V-2 alone has done the latter figure.

But speed wasn't the object, for in mid flight, the touch of a button back at the base, thirty miles away, caused the V-2 to disintegrate into fragments, after releasing its parasite rocket.

The prime objective here of course was to provide information suitable from a military standpoint. Here, rockets were weapons.

Regardless of that fact, the knowledge gained will be useful in the future when rocketry can be thought of in terms of Lunar trips. For it is practically a certainty, in light of the limited fuels available, that the two-stage rocket will unquestionably be the forerunner of regular moon-rocketry.

Useful information too, was gained on remote control and servo-mechanisms. The radio control of guided missiles is fast becoming a mechanical and electrical technique, rather than an art. We can certainly expect to see full use made of this fact when the "spacial stage" is reached. It's

encouraging to realize that in spite of the dearth of news on rocketry, there is a considerable amount of action going on. Most of it may be of a military nature, but as long as it's concerned with the one vehicle that's going to enable men to jump off the planet, it's okay with us!



A VARIATION on the Trojan horse scheme of tactics is being considered seriously by the authorities responsible for protecting us from atomic attack. This problem of the "Trojan Ship" has been discussed in these pages before but then it was academically, a problem to be dealt with in the indefinite future. As of now with the Communist tentacles spreading out over the world, the Trojan Ship menace is real and direct. Additional facts point up the danger.

The Trojan Ship scheme assumes that an enemy sends ships into our ports, in whose holds are atomic bombs. Then, either by timing devices or by suicide crews, the atomic bombs are detonated at some specific hour, blowing ship and port into kingdom come. When you reflect how many of our great industrial cities are effective seaports, it is easy to see, that this source of danger is truly fearful. The question posed is, naturally, what can we do about it?

Short of an actual quarantine of every vessel entering American ports—a quarantine conducted far from the port itself and involving a most thorough examination—there seems to be little to be done. The idea of simply walking aboard a ship with a Geiger-Mueller counter and waiting for the clicks as it detects the uranium simply won't work. It is too easy to shield against such a medium. Only a rigorous and careful individual examination of the entire contents could disclose the bomb, unless there are some highly secret, as yet-unrevealed, methods of detecting the bombs.

When you think of the terrific blow that a hundred such bombs exploded simultaneously, could do, you go white with fear. They could paralyze us! While the government is not disclosing much information on this menace at present, it is our private belief that there are ways and means of locating and isolating the smuggled bombs which we yet do not know about.

Let us hope so!



"CHUBB CRATER..."

THE LAST few months have seen a rash of meteoric crater discoveries. The news of the monster Siberian meteor which destroyed vast tracts of land near Mongolia, was released a short time ago. This event was of course of recent occurrence and very startling primarily in light of the fact that the meteor, a flaming heroic, ball of molten stone and iron, didn't strike any densely populated areas.

The famed Arizona crater has always been good copy, but it looks as if it's going to bow to a newcomer which has seized science's imagination. On the northwestern tip of the province of Quebec in Canada, a gigantic meteoric crater has been found. It was accidentally discovered by men flying over in aircraft, who noticed a huge circular crater of amazing regularity, which proved eventually to be only one thing—the resting place of a meteor of by-gone days. Apparently this meteor is one which landed several thousand years ago.

What makes it startling is the fact that it is four miles in diameter whereas the great Arizona depression is only two and a half! Blocks of reddish stone as big as freight cars lay all around as if some gigantic hand had tossed them as carelessly as billiard balls. Iron hasn't been found yet, but it will be undoubtedly. No one can actually guess how deep such a meteor is buried. Some maintain that the meteor is shattered into tiny pieces before and after it hits, leaving a negligible residue. Others believe that the major core of the meteor embeds itself deep within the Earth's surface, sinking deeper too, with the passage of patient time.

Chubb Crater, as the meteoric crater has been named after the prospector who discovered it, offers another challenge to the growing group of scientists and technicians who want to see the development of earth-boring machinery powerful enough to enable them to go to any depths they wish. While the major motive supposedly is for mining, we suspect that certainly not the least attraction is the hope that meteoric craters can be fully and genuinely explored instead of casually scraped as they are at present.

The purpose of such exploration...?

Who knows what the discovery of such a large meteor can tell us about the conditions of outer space. Surprising amounts of knowledge have already been gleaned from the small numerous meteorites already examined. Remember Arhennius's spore theory which advocated the idea that bacteria were brought to Earth by meteorites—this discredited thought, nevertheless stimulated a great deal of scientific theorizing and observation. Never ask the reason for or the use of a scientific idea. It has a strange way of becoming practical all of a sudden—remember the atomic bomb?

★ ★ ★



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The CLUB HOUSE

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Conducted by **ROG PHILLIPS**

ABOUT THE time this appears on the stands I shall be in California, after having attended the NORWESCON at Portland. I'll be seeing a lot of old friends on that trip from Chicago: Jack and Dot deCourcy, Rick Sneary, F. Towner Lanev, and too many others to list here. Also I'll have met a lot of people and made new friends. Don Day, I understand, is as big as I am. We've exchanged quite a few letters in the course of events, and I'm looking forward to meeting him.

There's always something new happening. I wrote a story about three years ago called "The Beast". It was never published, and somehow got lost. A couple of winters ago in Los Angeles I told the story to Howard Browne in his Hollywood office while he was lying out there. He thought it was an unusual story. A few weeks ago he asked me if I would write it again. I did, and one of these days it will appear in *Amazing Stories of Fantastic Adventures*. When you read it remember that it was written from memory after three years.

Ed Laev, 6222 Sahley St., Houston 17, Texas, writes me that he would like to start a fan club if any of you Houston fans will contact him. Do him a letter and get acquainted.

Five fan editors sent in their own review this time, and all five did a good job. The only criticism I have to offer them is that they did so well they'll be running me out of a job. (How did I ever get this idea of having the fans write their own reviews?) But seriously, I hope the day will come when I can take the old paste pot to put the reviews together, write a couple of sheets of editorial nonsense, and really be the conductor of the CLUB HOUSE.

The rules for writing your own review are three in number: (1) type it double-spaced on regular size paper, one side. (2) Begin with the name of your fanzine, price, date of issue reviewed, and your name and address. (3) Don't make it longer than three hundred words. The rest is up to you. Make it interesting. Remember, you're after new subscribers as well as erotica!

ORB: 15c; issue no. 5; Bob Johnson, 811 9th St., Greeley, Colorado. A spectacularly

different fanzine, featuring the best in fan-artists and writers. ORB is the "FLAIR" of fandom! Although the material employed is often highly unusual and bizarre, all is in the best of taste. Near the time this review is published, ORB's size will be reduced by half. At present it is legal-size, combining the uses of multilithing, mimeographing and dittoing. When the size change occurs, it will be completely multilithed. The present issue features H.S. Weatherby's topsy-turvy fantasy, "SHRIEKING APPROACH". This is an expurgated version, and is far funnier than when it was originally published in a more ribald form. The cover is a highly weird and stylized version of a mermaid, executed by Bill Benulis. In this issue, ORB introduces a very new fan, and a very original artist: Elizabeth Plautt. She's got Berger beat a mile! Also running in this issue are Donald Bourrea, Bruce Lane, Sandy Charoff, Sandra Osterlund, Neil Wood, and Emil Thompson. There's a big-time letter section, too, full of surprising and interesting comments.

Next issue: "Dragon"—the original Johnsonmonster is on the cover—and what an unusual cover it is! Be sure to reserve a copy. Each issue of ORB is a sell out!

Dear Rog,

Like all fan organizations the SAFANNAHIANs want to put out a zine. You've probably never heard of the Safannahians...we're a relatively new organization with very few connections with fandom. But we want to make connections and now that we've found a mimeo that we can use we're all set to...but we need material and subscribers.

The zine will be titled THE QUANDRY and will lean toward fantasy, personality and (we hope) art. We're going to sell subscriptions (10 zines and a yearbook) for a dollar and single ishs for a dime. We'll be selling ad space too. It'll run around twenty pages.

The staff is as follows:

Editor....QAZ

IDEA MEN & CRANK TURNERS...

Hector Torrie and Hank Rabey.

It will be published by Lee Hoffman with the kind loan of Armstrong College's mimeo.

We can promise material by Heck and

QAZ, Hank, and the ed of the old COSMIC DUST, Walt Kessel. We hope we'll be able to obtain material from some of the better known fan between now and publication time. In fact, if you can manage anything...material, a letter, a smile, anything...it would be greatly appreciated.

Lee Hoffman
101 Wagner Street
Savannah, Ga.

Dear Rog,

"The first issue of BEELZEBUB is, I think, a good one, as far as first issues go. It includes a fine cover by Henry Chabot, some swell poetry by Michael De Angelis, a story by Joe Dean, quiz by Binge Clarke, and a delightfully wacky poem by the well-known poet A. Nonymous, in addition to the editorial, reviews, and news column by myself. BEELZY is 12 pages long, and sells for a dime.

"I'm accepting no long-term subscriptions for BEELZEBUB (pronounced BAY-ELLE-BUB), as changes in size and layout are forthcoming, and the price may change as a result. So far, the only things definite for next issue are a Bok cover (!), a short-short by Ed Noble, Jr., a report on the New York Science-Fiction Conference, and some artwork by James Moneval, a new artist."

Any further comments you wish to make on BEELZY in *The Club House* are all right by me. Oh yes—our second issue will include a big letter department, called (naturally) *THUS I REFUTE BEELZY*.

Morton D. Paley
1455 Townsend Ave.
New York 52, N.Y.

FAN-FARE, 15c, 6/65c; published bi-monthly by S. S. R. Fan-Publications, 119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, New York; edited by W. Paul Ganley and Robert E. Briney. The current, July, issue is also the first completely mimeographed issue, except for two titles which are done in two-color hecto. Scanning the contents page, we find only three stories this time, but one is the twelve-page conclusion to a two-part serial by Andrew Duane. He really gets going in this second part of what is quite an outstanding story for a fanzine. Another astonishing thing is the fact that Curtis Stewart's cover actually *does* illustrate the lead story; that seems to be a policy of this fanzine: It happened last issue, and the editor mentions in his editorial that he's having someone do a story around next issue's cover! And as for the lead story (which is by Ed Noble, Jr.)—it's the ultimate in "flying saucer"—or should we follow Ed Noble and call them "flying sossurs"?—stories! In the book review section Al Leverenz, a North Tonawanda fan who, by the way, recently won a scholarship of \$350 a year for four years to any college he wants to attend—reviews Ray Bradbury's celebrated "Martian Chronicles", and a couple of other fans review other current and out-of-print books.

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Three short bits of poetry—most of which surprisingly scans—are scattered throughout the issue as filler. The letter column was very abbreviated this time—a half-page, as compared with the usual two pages—but a regular-size "What the Cat Dragged In" is promised for the next issue.

THE CATAclysm, Published, as of this issue, irregularly, by Del Close and Bob Briney at 1726 Poyntz. Material should be sent to Bob Briney at 561 W. Western Avenue, Muskegon, Michigan. Price 10c.

The editors are happy to report that this issue is finally out. And an improvement, too. Twelve pages, with colored illustrations, and cover! And the cover—a cute little green and red cobra.

The CATAclysm is, at present, the only fan mag specializing in fantasy and stf poetry. (We hear another one is coming up—and pretty good, too. Its name: CHALLENGE. This plug just goes to show what good sports we eds are.) In this issue of the CATAclysm, there is some excellent poetry, and some rather mediocre stuff. We feature this time, Lee Gann, Toby Duane, Eugene DeWeese, S. L. Lawrence, and a new author, Donna Morine, who can give Poe a run for his money, in our editorial opinion. Give us a try, won't you? And remember—we still need *your* contributions.

Those five whose reviews you've just read did a good job. They're in business. Give them a real break and subscribe to their fanzine.

Now we come to the reviews of the rest of the fanzines. Some are new, most have been coming out pretty regularly.

ROCKET RESEARCH: Quarterly; 75c, 4'83; George S. James, 3262 Castera Avenue, Glendale 5, Calif. Published by the Rocket Research Society, this elaborate fanzine gives you more than your money's worth of charts, photographs and articles. There are twenty-five clearly reproduced black and white photos of jet planes and rockets, in addition to many charts and

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diagrams, one of which is a full-color insert showing the earth's structure and characteristics of its atmosphere.

The editorial staff, consisting of Editor George James and associates Harold L. Chambers, Robert L. Clark, Arthur Louis Joquel, II, Marie L. Joquel, William Morey and Nick G. Stasinos have turned out a capably written variety of articles dealing with rockets and jet planes. The subjects covered range from reviews of current books and movies through the more technical aspects of rocket design and construction.

Neatly done up, with an attractive format, this zine will be welcomed by all fans, especially those with an interest in rocketry.

THE OUTLANDER: 15c; Rick Sneary and Len Moffatt, editors; subscriptions and letter- should be sent to Freddy Hershey, 6335 King Avenue, Bell, California. Issue no. 5 of *The Outlander* (published at irregular intervals by *The Outlander Society*) contains the second installment of Len Moffatt's serial "Several Out of Tune". Will Shakespeare is brought onto the scene via Franklin's time snatcher for a short but hectic visit, after which he departs for Minnesota leaving us to await the next time traveller. The most noteworthy article in this issue is Freddy Hershey's "Play Therapy". This is a serious and rather heart-rending account of her visit with some of the ex-service men and women at the Brentwood Hospital, and while not in line with the usual type of material found in fanzines it is an interesting and thought-provoking article. *The Outlander* contains material ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous, and by "ridiculous" we mean the ridiculously nonsensical "Portrait of the Proletariat as a Young Fan" by Con Pederson who is one of the better writers of the fan field. Send your 15c to Freddy for the latest copy of *The Outlander*.

FANTASY ADVERTISER: 15c; May and July numbers; 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, Cal. The editor's name isn't given. It should be. Its pages are filled with ads containing sfz zines and books. Also book reviews of a high caliber. Something different is an auction. The items in the auction are listed with no price. If you want any of them you submit your bid. If you're high man you get it. Items such as (4) CAPTAIN FUTURE no. 1 mint should bring several high bids.

EUSIFANO: 10c; June issue; Eugene Science-Fantasy Society, 146 E. 12th, Eugene Oregon, under the new management of Roscoe Wright. Eugene is only a hundred or less miles from Portland where the NORWESCON was held this year. For sheer imagination the "article" on the Martian Zippelwig by Douglas Furch (of the Idaho Furchs I presume?) is really sumpt. Rick Sneary comes forth with

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an article on hucksterism at the annual convention. It is a disagreeable thing, as he says. I've noticed that several off-shade outfits have taken the NORWESCON list of members and mailed advertising, using it as a sucker list. That is as distasteful as getting acquainted with a new friend and having him send an insurance salesman around. Nothing can be done about it so far as I know. As for hucksterism at the convention itself, I didn't see anything that could be classed as that at the Convention, and don't expect to see any at the Norwescon. The conventions are run by the fans and what appears there is up to the fan group running things.

ASMODEUS: no price listed but you should be ashamed to ask for a copy unless you send a dime. A first issue, published by Alan S. Pesetsky, and Morton D. Paley, Joe Dean, Elliot Morris as associate editors, 1475 Townsend Ave., New York 52, N.Y.. And I see on the last page the price is a dime after all.

Three stories, "The Best Laid Plans" by Ray Clancy taking up most of the pages. There are seven poems, one of them by Clark Ashton Smith, and an article—well whataya know—by Rog Phillips! It was during a weak moment at the ESFA meeting in Newark in February.

SPACEWARP: 15c 2 25c; Arthur H. Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw Mich.. The July issue is interesting, to say the least of this old and sterling fanzine. For example, "Fan Fiction—Fine or Foul?" by Lee Gann, editor of FAN-FARE, another fanzine reviewed in this department. Then there's "The Mathematics of Fandom" by Lee Jacobs. I guess I can't understand it. The most I can make out of it after spending fifteen years mastering the subject is that the integral of Lee Jacobs over pi squared equals the square of the hypotenuse times the angle I tried on a blonde two years ago last Tuesday. There's more in the issue but pardon me while I go to the drugstore and get some aspirins. Best thing in the issue is Art Rapp's editorial on feeding versus arguing.

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; issue no. 107; James V. Taurasi, 127-03 Thirty-second Ave., Flushing, N.Y.. The best newsline in fandom. Anthony Boucher is to be Norwescon guest of honor. F-T is being hard pressed to keep up on reports of the many new prozines hitting the stands. Tom Gardner finishes his review of *Fantastic Adventures* for 1949. In this one fanzine you can keep track of just about everything that happens in fandom and in the pro field.

—Rog Phillips

SATANIC SATELLITE



By Cal Webb



THE PANASIAN officer lifted his head from the cross-hatched radar-plate and breathed a sigh of relief. He turned to his subordinate.

"Ah," he said, "and that one is Toledo! You know, Suvanoff, I am almost sorry we had to destroy that place. In my youth I visited it with a commercial mission. Oh well, those are the fortunes of war. Precision armaments." He glanced at his wrist watch. "We will have to observe the effect in eleven minutes."

"That was number four, sir," Suvanoff said regretfully. "We won't receive any more for ten days."

The officer shrugged. "Ten days?—ten years. What does it matter? They are utterly helpless. The Northamericans cannot stop us from picking off their cities as we choose. By the time they get around to constructing a war-rocket we will have destroyed them with atomic bombs—the fools!"

The two men were observing the effects of atomic bombing from the Panasian satellite, a hundred foot metal shell six thousand miles above the Earth's surface. In these last few days since the first atomic bombs had been delivered to them, they had destroyed Chicago, and half of New York. That had taken three bombs. The fourth was on its way to Toledo this minute.

The Panasians chatted aimlessly for the next ten minutes both conscious however of the internal tension within them. The seven crew members too were expectantly waiting for the annihilation flash signifying the disappearance of another North-american city.

"Almost, Captain Chi'en," said Suvanoff. "We have a minute and a half to wait."

Both men bent eagerly toward the viewport, eyes straining against the grid lines. On the sphere beneath them, utterly helpless and unconscious of the fact that it was to be the next victim, lay the helpless city.

Then it happened. Captain Chi'en gasped at the sight even though he had seen it three times before. There was an incredibly brilliant pin-point of flaring light which winked out as fast as it arose. A 'scope would have shown more, would have shown the mushrooming cloud, the twisting rising trail of ghastly vapors from the stricken city. But to the observers in the satellite the monstrous assault appeared merely as the winking of light less impressive in a way than the turning of a wall-switch. But beneath the Panasian satellite gaped the eraser that had been Toledo...

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The iron hand of acceleration lessened its grip of John Fleming and he breathed more freely. He shook his head and stared closely at the guide lines. Thank God, he thought, that the jury-rigged rocket was free. Right now, thousands of miles beneath, men were working like fiends to build and send more into space, but at this very moment, his was the first—the first answer to the devastating Panasian satellite. Behind him, John thought of the bleeding scars that laced Northamerica. Save for this sudden spurt in Panasian technology, the war might have ended. But the Panasians had gotten the satellite into space and had used it as a weapon. Savagely Fleming thought of the inertia that caused this debacle among Northamericans.

But he was going to stop it. He had to. There was only one answer. Destroy the satellite! And the rocket he now bestrode was essentially nothing but a vast torpedo. Crammed with chemical explosive—the danger of an atomic misfire could not be chanced—it would shatter the satellite into a million fragments. All he had to do was get it there!

John's hands moved with assurance as soon as the radar pinpointed the satellite. In a few minutes it would be optically clear. He made the minute motor corrections and the rocket responded rapidly. It was crude—but it would do the job.

There it was! He caught the twinkle of flickering light as a sunbeam bounced off the polished aluminum shell. There it lay! A thousand meters away it glared like the pupil of an ominous eye.

Fleming set the rocket on guide. It wasn't necessary for him to suicide it. Northamericans didn't die like that. He checked the sights once more, made sure his suit was tight and that he had his signal and hand rockets. Then he stepped through the easily opened port and with a slight flare of the hand rocket freed himself from the empty projectile. As he braked his velocity with the hand rocket the desperate thought occurred: should I have taken the chance that it miss? Anxiously he waited. Its proximity fused nose could not fail, dare not fail! Why had he risked it? Why hadn't he suicided it?

But all the worry was needless. Fleming saw the satellite erupt into a blast of mushrooming fragments surrounded by a halo of flame. One moment its proud gleaming aluminum spheroidal shape rested there so challengingly—then it was gone in a flash of light.

Fleming breathed a sigh of relief. The menace was gone for the time being. Now all he had to do was wait. The rockets would soon be up and they carried some presents for the Panasians below, small objects whose containers carried a dose of the same treatment for the Panasian hordes beneath. As best he could, Fleming settled himself in his metallic suit and waited. Northamerican rockets were on their way...



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